

The Lid Off



FIFTY YEARS OF
INDIAN POLITICS

• • • • • J. N. SAHNI

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Preface

During my visits abroad, and many a time while addressing audiences in India, I was often asked to suggest a book or books which could offer to the reader a comprehensive understanding of the political, economic and social problems of contemporary India: its cultural traditions, the life of the common people, of the ruling princes, the alien rulers, and the manner in which Indian leadership by various stages and through varying methods built up the national struggle, which finally led to the birth of two Independent States—India and Pakistan. Many have evinced even greater interest and curiosity about the two countries after Independence, especially India, where parliamentary democracy has met its greatest challenges—poverty, ignorance and superstition—and found its most successful laboratory.

The number of books anyone could suggest—biographies, autobiographies, narratives, official records, critical treatises and essays—seemed to be dozens, some running into several volumes. Among them were some most readable books written by eminent scholars and leaders including Gandhi himself and Jawaharlal Nehru. While each of these dealt with a particular period or facet of national life, not all of them were expected to tell the complete story. Even what I have attempted in these pages is not a complete story. India is a vast country covering an area from Lisbon to Warsaw. It is more densely populated than any other country except China. For centuries its people have lived in a diversity of religion, language and tradition, though united in a bond of common culture, in whose evolution many generations have variously contributed.

The last fifty years in Indian history, however, are of special importance for several reasons. They witnessed a unique

struggle in human history, to overthrow a great imperialist power, by a variety of methods: pleadings, protests, resistance, violence and finally mass-based nonviolence. The struggle was led by men of rare dedication, ability and courage, whose sufferings and sacrifices, by themselves, would rank them among the great heroes of history. Then there are the years of freedom. These have been years of a grand effort to uproot poverty, to fight illiteracy and superstition, and to build up a free society on the bedrock of democracy and socialism. To compress in one book a complete picture of the political upheaval that brought about the end of British rule, or of the twenty-three-odd years of freedom in which concord and conflict, blunders and achievements, greatness and meanness, sacrifice and corruption have gone hand in hand, could not be an easy task for anyone.

In making this attempt, however, I had some special advantages. I was born at the turn of the century, when the resistance movement was taking an incipient form and shape. I was ten when I first saw the inside of a British lock-up. I was fifteen when I became member of a secret political society, and took a hand at the making of bombs. At eighteen I escaped death from the bullets of a British soldier which whizz passed my shoulders. In my nineteenth year I met at close quarters all the contemporary political celebrities of India. At the age of twenty I burnt my boats and joined the national struggle in response to the personal call of Gandhi. Three years later I went round the country holding brief jobs in various newspapers, trying to find a place in the profession. I was twenty-six when I became the editor of *The Hindustan Times*, then the only daily English newspaper in the Capital. I was then by far the youngest among contemporary editors. I have lived in Delhi ever since. The last important office I held in the Indian National Congress was in 1951. The last official assignment I have filled was to represent my country at the U.N. for five consecutive years.¹

It would seem that from the twenties onwards, I became an

¹ Ending 1961.

intimate part of the national struggle, and a chronicler of national events. I shared with the leaders persecution and imprisonments and, at the same time, observed their behaviour under the strain of adversity. I joined in their deliberations as an equal, and studied them at close quarters as a critic. It is not merely with political leaders of almost three generations that I came into intimate contact. In this chequered career I came to know most of the outstanding writers, authors, religious and social leaders, scientists, savants, artists, singers, actors, dancers, all of whom made their contribution to enrich contemporary Indian thought and culture. At the same time, even though in opposition, in my professional capacity I enjoyed the hospitality of Viceroys and high officials, and came to know many of them intimately, enjoying on occasions even their confidence. I also enjoyed the hospitality and friendship of a large number of Indian princes, and had occasion to make first-hand studies of the life of these chieftains and their people. Public life and professional errands during these years took me to big cities and remote villages all over the country. I not only witnessed, but shared on several occasions the life of the commonest of villagers: sleeping in their cowsheds, wading through the slush of their dung-paved streets, and enjoying their simple hospitality.

I had my share of persecution and imprisonments. I have also been witness to firings on passive crowds, brutal beating of women and children, savage assaults on protesting *satyagrahis* and to scenes of ruthless official violence, the memory of which even today makes me shudder. I have also seen among the people brute frenzy bursting into incendiary outrages, violence and murder, taking the ugliest forms that savagery and callousness can imagine, all in the name of God, caste and community. I have watched brave men fasting unto death for great causes. I have also seen thousands undergoing slow starvation, till the carcass is reduced to bones without flesh. I have shared the pomp and glory of the nation's heroes. I have also witnessed the snobbery and arrogance of power-hungry, public-cheating charlatans. I have suffered with my

people the humiliation of political slavery. I have also listened to their wails of woe when after more than two decades of freedom they remain "the champion rag-pickers" of the world.

I do not claim that my advantages or my experiences have been unique. But when one has to write about a period which has still not become a part of history one, so advantageously placed in the current of events and with such varied experience, is able better to fill in many a gap left by others, to enable the future historian, or a student of current affairs, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the people and their problems.

It is not possible for anyone who has been so close to the scene of events, and has many times been part of those events, to be completely objective. Long years of professional training, however, have helped me to take as detached a view of some of the most stirring and provocative happenings as possible. While trying to be objective, I have however not lost sight of human interest. If, therefore, what I have written about some of the major characters, who prominently occupied the national stage during the last half-a-century or more, does not accord with the picture they have painted about themselves, or the perfection their admirers have attributed to them, it is because my contacts with them were human. While respecting their virtues, I did not close my eyes to their weaknesses. In fact, it has required considerable courage to speak of them with candour, since in India hero-worship like idol-worship are part of a national tradition. Gullible people are prone to deify heroes into *avatars*,² and edify charlatans as heroes. It has needed even greater courage to modify the orbit of praise, by attributing to the leaders wanton or inadvertant blunders, petty intrigues, and even pettier jealousies, which sometimes changed the course of history.

While a lot of recorded and unrecorded material was available from several sources, I have had to depend mostly on myself, to fill in the gaps, to correlate the material and to sustain human interest! The narrative has hence taken the

² Incarnations of God.

form of a grand human drama, with this difference, that truth has sometimes seemed stranger, more tense, more soul-stirring and more dramatic than an imaginative creation of the human mind. While all this has made an otherwise long story interesting, more readable and richly anecdotal, I have not in the process either tried to gild the lily, or to emphasise any dark shades more than facts justified.

My greatest satisfaction, after reading the manuscript several times myself, has been that I have been able to transmit to the reader, and more so to posterity true images of this great human drama: frank intimate studies of the chief actors, a vivid colourful picture of the people among whom they lived, as I had retained them through the years. If with the passing of time some of the images have blurred, I crave the readers' indulgence. But I have meticulously seen to it that none of the images are distorted, either by loyalty or by prejudice.

I must however apologise to several of the younger leaders, who have made their *début* on the national stage in recent years, for not offering to the reader their intimate close-up studies in the same manner as I have done in the case of leaders of an earlier generation. I had come close to some of them when they were serving their political apprenticeship at the United Nations a decade or so ago. I have known others since they grew up under the tutelage of their illustrious fathers. I have had the privilege of working with quite a few in different organisations. It is not therefore ignorance that has persuaded me not to hold the mirror to them, and also to deprive the reader of my intimate impressions, but discretion. I have avoided this because only a few of them have reached a stature worthy of national recognition. It is too early therefore to attribute to them greatness in anticipation. Besides they are not confident enough of their position in public life, to agree to laugh at themselves or to be laughed at.

The elders reached the positions of power after years of dedicated service. The juniors have wanted to offer service after scaling the seats of power. Thus they have to be judged by different values. One of the new values has been the sanctions

of "conscience". These sanctions have led to conflicting actions and questionable conduct. For these reasons it has been more difficult to write with candour about the last fifty months, than about the last fifty years. Both periods cover a very controversial period in national politics. But in an atmosphere surcharged with partisanship, as in recent months, the honest critic is likely to be least popular with any of the contending parties. Not to have covered this period also, would have been to shirk a public duty. In discharging this duty I have therefore tried not to tread on sensitive corns as much as possible and to avoid premature judgments on controversial issues.

I have written this intimate, inside story of the last fifty years essentially for my own people and more so for the generations of tomorrow. For them I have tried to separate the chaff from the grain, so that the greatness of the heroes of the past may serve as a beacon light, and at the same time their weaknesses and blunders become a guide for corrective action. Those in foreign countries, who wish to make a serious study of Indian politics of the last five decades, will also find the book exceptionally informative and most readable.

To produce an original work, based on observation and experience covering a crucial and dramatic period in national history, has been by no means an easy job. While I have enjoyed every moment of the five years it has taken me to complete the manuscript, there have been in between many periods of frustration, and depression. During these my wife has been both an inspiration and a source of strength. Some friendly "hostiles" have also helped to create the atmosphere for concentrated endeavour. All this I must acknowledge. My thanks are also due to my old friend, Bakshi Shiv Charan Singh, a distinguished advocate, for his invaluable advice.

J. N. SAHNI

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1

The Making of a Criminal

As the SS City of London steamed out of Karachi harbour I breathed a sigh of relief. The hour between my crossing the gangway and the steamer whistling its departure had been a period of high tension. A warrant of arrest had been issued against me and many of my Congress colleagues in my home town. In my passport I had been shown clean-shaven. To reach Karachi I had camouflaged my identity by growing a substantial beard and broad whiskers. I had spent some days in town functioning as a reporter for the Tribune under my surname. The Ali brothers, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew¹ were being tried for sedition in the Khalikdina Hall. I was supposed to be reporting this sensational case. Admission to the Khalikdina Hall was by tickets. My identification card carried a photograph of me in beard and whiskers.

To my horror, I found that the same Anglo-Indian police officer who had been checking my identity card at the Khalikdina Hall was on the boat engaged in stamping the passports of the passengers. I was in a cold sweat as I lined up behind the other passengers, fearing that he may suspect my identity, or may have some secret instructions to apprehend me before departure. When he looked at the passport and then at my clean-shaven face, I almost died. But he only asked me a few innocent questions, even remarked that I was too young to be leaving alone for the high seas, and advised me to be very

¹ Congress leaders in the twenties.

careful about my belongings at Port Said where a lot of pilferage had been reported.

After the clearance I ran down to my cabin as quickly as I could, and locked myself in till the steamer sailed out of the harbour and was well on the high seas. I pulled out my press identification card, stood against the mirror and compared the Khadi-wearing, bearded and whiskered character that I had been with the clean-shaven young man in a newly-tailored suit that I was, and agreed that the camouflage was highly deceptive. I tore up the identity card and allowed the fragments to trail on the Arabian sea.

It was the end of "N. Jogendra", the press correspondent, and the beginning of J. N. Sahni.

It was the autumn of 1921. I was in my twenty-first year. As I lay in one of the deck chairs watching the swelling tides of the Arabian Sea, I recalled some of the storms and tempests I had witnessed, and the many high tides and low tides in national life that had shaped my own destiny.

I was then eight. One afternoon in the company of a few school friends curiosity took me to the marketplace. Thousands in the city were going that way. I was then studying in a European school in the hills in summer, and with a private European tutor on the plains in winter. This was wintertime. As we reached the marketplace we found thousands of people collected around a raised platform. Hundreds were perched on trees. Several hundred more stood huddled on projecting balconies. Rawalpindi at the time was the biggest military arsenal in the East. A shallow stream, stinking with the sewage of two cities, separated the Cantonment and the Indian quarters. Mostly Europeans lived in the Cantonment, where army barracks spread over several miles. British soldiers kept guard on ammunition dumps. Indians lived across the stream in a congested city. They were fairly affluent. Except for professional people, they were mostly dependent on army contracts and army supplies. They were hence inclined to be unduly loyal to the British Raj. A public meeting of this magnitude

in our city was therefore a rare, if not an altogether unknown phenomenon.

Our curiosity satisfied, we began playing marbles in a quiet corner. We were soon attracted by a thunderous voice. A tall Sikh was standing on the platform and haranguing the audience. In between harangues he would sing with a lilting voice, and the audience vociferously picked up the refrain in chorus, "Pagri sambhal O Jatta pagri sambhal O!"² I later learnt that the speaker was Ajit Singh, whose nephew Bhagat Singh was to become in later years one of the great martyrs of our national history. Then there was pindrop silence. A short, walrus-whiskered man wearing a turban started to address. He began in slow, measured accents. Soon his voice rose to a thunderclap. The audience roared back chosen slogans in applause. There was a magic spell in his speech, and an element of command in his gestures. His name was Lajpat Rai who was later arrested and deported to Mandalay in Burma.

A few days afterwards my father's senior clerk came unexpectedly to the house of our European tutor, in the family phaeton. He requested that I and my elder brother be allowed leave. In the carriage he told us that all those whose names had appeared on the poster by which the mammoth meeting addressed by Lajpat Rai had been called had been arrested. My father was one of them. Several others like my father were leading lawyers of the city. The trial was being held in the Sessions Court in the Cantonment. We were being taken, since no one knew what fate may befall the accused. Thousands of citizens had collected outside the court. It was heavily guarded. As we waited in the carriage the news went round that the accused had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and had been sneaked off to the Central Jail.

The crowd got excited. Nandlal, my father's senior clerk, waving his big stick began shouting slogans, standing on the coachman's seat. As the carriage moved, the excited crowd formed itself into a large procession to return to the city. We brothers were thrilled by the excitement around us and terribly

² Take care of your turban — Oh farmer take care!

frightened, not knowing what to do. Along the route, a few British soldiers stopped by, out of curiosity. They were mauled and manhandled. Their uniforms were torn. They were left bleeding with nothing on except their boots.

Excitement increased. A church was set on fire en route. The church bell was taken down from the belfry and carried on a pole as a trophy. Nearby was a Government-subsidised High School. By now we had left the carriage, and with several other boys had joined the rabble. In insensate madness, the violent mob set fire to the furniture, broke down the window panes, and even entered the laboratory. Someone ignited the gas cylinder, near which we were huddled. It blew up, leaving us bleeding from splinters and with soot-covered faces.

Meanwhile the police arrived. They bundled everyone with splinter wounds or a soot-covered face in big carts and locked us up in the neighbouring police station. We had been huddled in a dingy room for nearly two hours when we saw father walk in, accompanied by a European officer. They both laughed at our soot-covered faces. We were taken home. We learnt later that father had been set free, since he was not in town when the poster had been issued. His name had been added without his knowledge. The tragedy of it however was that Nandlal, whose excitement was mainly due to father's arrest, was sentenced to a three-year term. He died soon after release.

Even though I had passed through a storm of excitement, I was at an age when I had no idea what it was all about. Our European tutor merely explained that a place called Bengal had been partitioned, and some bad characters and unruly elements were out to create mischief.

A year or two later, during Christmas, father took us to Lahore, where he was going to attend a Session of the Indian National Congress. I have some vivid impressions of this sojourn. At a ceremonial session that we attended with father, there were a lot of children and a large number of elderly people. They were dressed in all kinds of garments. Many like my father were wearing striped trousers, others pyjamas and

dhoties. Quite a few wore flowing robes of different kinds with all types of turbans.

We had to do so much bowing and touching of feet that our backs ached. One of the "uncles" to whom we were introduced was a lean, bearded Bengali, Surendra Nath Banerjee. He was important as, according to my father, my elder brother was given his name because he was Congress President in the year my brother was born. Another uncle who seemed to like "feet-touching" and offered many blessings was Madan Mohan Malaviya, the President of the Session. Someone had told father a story the previous evening which had made us laugh. He said that when Malaviya arrived, people unharnessed the horses of his coach and decided to pull the coach themselves. At some stage the ropes snapped. The men near the coach tugged hard to tie the ropes to the coach. The devotees ahead pulled harder to move the "coach" forward. Thus in this tug-of-war the coach remained where it was. After a furlong of pulling the processionists realized what had happened. Meanwhile the horses had been yoked and the coach proceeded. It was difficult to suppress my giggles as we bent lower and lower to receive the blessings of the saintly man in white robes, the hero of the yarn told to us earlier.

Another memory I carried was of a wrestler as large as a baby elephant. He was the star attraction at the wrestling tournament held as a side show. He was Kikar Singh, the human giant. My father was a partner in a theatrical company, so we spent most of the time seeing matinée shows. Here I discovered that all the chorus girls, queens and maids were boys!

I recalled a few hectic days I spent years later in the city of Lahore, where I had gone to play in a hockey tournament on behalf of my college. I was staying with my elder brother in his boarding house, far removed from the city. These were the days when there was a lot of talk among students about the Rowlett Act, a strange man called Gandhi, and the miracles he had performed in South Africa. There had been some kind of hartal, and there was a lot of excitement and commotion in

the city. Leaders were haranguing crowds at several places. We joined one of the crowds, which soon started moving to the Mall. At the tri-junction leading to the Mall between the Telegraph Office and the Post Office the mob was stopped by a platoon of soldiers and ordered to disperse. No one had heard the order. We did not even know why the mob had slowed down. No one dispersed. A thick high wall had been built around the telegraph office. Behind the wall a large contingent of soldiers had been placed with their rifles implanted in gun holes. Suddenly a barrage of bullets poured into the gathered mass from the telegraph office, killing a few and wounding many. Two bullets whizzed past my shoulders. Watchful friends shouted my name and asked me to lie down. It appeared that some student spies in the crowd had heard the name. A few days later a friend of mine from my home town, bearing the same name as mine, was expelled from his College. A case of mistaken identity!

What however made me burst into solo giggles in my deck chair was the recollection of my visit a few days later to Uncle Tiwana. Uncle Tiwana was the high priest of a religion called "loyalty". Starting as Umar, he became during the years Khan Bahadur Sir Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana, K.C.I.E., C.I.E., Baronet. He had been a member of the War Council and of the Secretary of State's Council. He was sublimely illiterate. He had a peasant's appearance, wore long locks under a turban like a farmer and had the peasant's habits. He was rough, gracious and hospitable.

As a result of disturbances, Martial Law had been declared in the city, and in most other towns in the Punjab. Harrowing tales of a wholesale massacre by one General Dyer in Jallianwala Bagh had come from Amritsar. The neighbouring town of Gujranwala had been bombed. All transport was requisitioned by the Martial Law authorities. People were indiscriminately whipped and beaten up. Students were made to carry their bedrolls on their heads and march four to five miles to salute the Union Jack. Even though I was the guest of my

brother, I had to undergo the same punishment. No one without a special permit was allowed to leave Lahore by train.

In this predicament my brother and I thought of Uncle Tiwana. He lived a furlong or so from the Mall, beyond the statue of Queen Victoria, where every day miscreants were brought to salute the Union Jack, to the playing of the British National Anthem. As we entered the spacious courtyard of his house, we found a lot of other people, lawyers, students, professors, who also like us wanted permits to leave Lahore. He was the only Indian in Lahore who could issue such permits. Uncle Tiwana, wearing a Jat turban, a loose shirt and a flapping lungi received us with fraternal embraces and offered us fruits and milk. Then without rhyme or reason he gave us a few sturdy slaps, which almost made us reel.

Before we could recover he asked what the hell we had been doing to seek his help. This was his way of obtaining confessions. You were dubbed guilty before you could prove your innocence! We told him that we had done nothing. We had solemnly saluted the Union Jack, had carried our bedrolls and had sung the Anthem when required. He felt satisfied. He offered us more sweets and a tray full of food.

Then suddenly the feudal rustic got up, left his hukka, took off his shoes, removed his turban, placing it in both hands, and stood to attention. At the sign of a nod all his attendants ordered us to do the same. Everyone stood bareheaded and barefooted to attention. We thought it was a sort of prayer ritual. He looked solemn. We learnt later that whenever the band played the British National Anthem near the Victoria statue, as a mark of his loyalty, he expected everyone to join in this solemn ritual.

The Amritsar Congress Session of 1919 had left some very impressionable memories of my adolescent years. I recalled how on a cold December morning in freezing temperature I with fifty-odd students from my home town reached Amritsar. We were part of a volunteer corps which had collected from various cities to help local organizers to prepare for the Session.

Amritsar had undergone a period of ruthless, savage barbarism during the days of Martial Law. Its people were still terror-stricken. While Jallianwalla Bagh, where General Dyer had opened fire on thousands of unarmed citizens, had become hallowed ground for visitors, local residents still could not enter the hemmed-in enclosure without tears welling up in their eyes. The ground carried telltale patches of red, the walls were riddled with bullet holes from which human flesh was still sticking out. In the well of sorrow, human carcasses were still floating on the putrid water. Even though it had been more than six months, the residents still avoided the "crawling" street where hundreds of them had been forced to creep like lizards at the point of bayonets. Practically all the leaders had been bundled up and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Even then the common people had not lost their soul. Gandhi had insisted that the Congress Session of the year should be held as scheduled in Amritsar.

Everyone was doing everything to make elaborate arrangements. We with several other volunteers were quartered in the spacious warehouse of a spinning mill, normally used for storing cotton bales. A thick layer of hay had been laid to serve as a common matress during the night and as floor covering during the day. We helped in setting up the pandal and the delegates' tents.

Soon delegates and leaders started pouring in from all over the country by special and ordinary trains. At this time the railway porters went on strike. We were suddenly commissioned to transport the loads of luggage of an unending stream of incoming passengers. One of these, more striking than the others, emerged from a first class compartment dressed like a fashion-plate model—tall, slim, commanding. His attendant poured out several fancy pieces of luggage, and insisted that each piece be carried separately. He himself undertook to carry the tiffin carrier and a silver-knobbed walking stick of the "master". We felt proud of the commission, since the gentleman in topcoat, sola topee, gloves and spats was the famous M. A. Jinnah. A car had come to receive him. As we laid

down the bags, he pulled out a few silver coins and insisted on giving us a "tip". When we explained that we were "volunteers" and not coolies, he grinned, looked at us with new-born curiosity, pulled out a large cake from the tiffin basket, and offered it to us.

Gandhi arrived by car from Lahore. Wearing a turban, wrapped in a shawl over his dhoti and kurta, his bare feet in chappals, he would have passed as a mere peasant. Motilal Nehru, the President of the session, looked imperious but gallant. He had also come by car, with his wife, two daughters, a daughter-in-law and a sprightly, youthful, handsome son. Jawaharlal had already won the hearts of young men in the Punjab, because he had spent several months collecting evidence of Martial Law atrocities in the Punjab in collaboration with C. R. Das. Das was soft-spoken, gentle and affable. He was every inch a Bengali. In his entourage was Bipin Chandra Pal, voluble in speech, gargantuan in appetite, and with the capacity of roaring like a lion.

After we had broken the porters' strike, fresh troubles began. As a result of incessant rain, the *pandal* had got flooded. We spent the night throwing out water from the *pandal*. Next day brought unexpected ceremonial strains. After the Presidential procession had ended, the great Lokmanya Tilak arrived. Dressed in a red and gold cap, in flowing robes, a dhoti, and red Maharashtrian slippers, he looked as if one of the Peshwas of history had stepped out of a painting. He looked majestic! We had to organize an impromptu procession to accord him welcome. Then a mini-procession had to be arranged for an elderly lady, her silver head looking like a mammoth chrysanthemum, and her spreading apparel making her appear like one of the statues of Queen Victoria. She was Mrs Annie Besant. By the evening a special train arrived bringing the Ali brothers, Mohammed and Shaukat, from Chindwara. They had been detained for a few years since the war. They had also to be taken in procession. The floral resources of the city were now completely exhausted. So we ransacked the carriage in which earlier leaders had been taken.

to honour the Ali brothers. By nighttime the Punjab leaders poured in. They had been unexpectedly released. All we could do was to garland them in turns, gently rescuing the garlands from one recipient to be passed on to the other.

We had too much to do during this session to bother about the proceedings. It seemed that most of the time had been taken up by the leaders to discuss the Reforms that had been recently offered by Britain in accordance with the recommendations of a Committee consisting of Edwin Montague, the Liberal Secretary of State, and Lord Chelmsford, a hardboiled Conservative. "To accept or to reject" seemed to be the dilemma. Half of the leaders were for rejection and the other half for acceptance. Finally, half a dozen legal minds got together and evolved a generally acceptable formula: "While neither accepting nor rejecting the bill of reforms, the Congress agreed to work them for what they were worth."—Applause!

I had also formed some physical impressions. During the proceedings Lokmanya Tilak stood out aloof but domineering. He did not make many speeches, but he was listened to with great respect and attention. Gandhi seemed most unimpressive, but his very simplicity attracted utmost attention. He spoke in a feeble voice, but he was the Hamlet of the play. Annie Besant was rhetorical, but evoked no applause. There was a lot of showmanship about Jinnah. His sleek figure, his hands, his monocle, all moving to keep pace and rhythm with his words. He seemed most impressive when he was denouncing something, whatever it might be. A young man, who was new to Congress politics, however stole the show from Jinnah. He was more immaculately dressed, was younger and very much more handsome. Rhetorically he was more convincing, and persuasive. It was Syed Hussain, a protege of Motilal Nehru. The elder Nehru, tall, with an athletic build, his whiskers drooping profusely over the upper lip, looked every inch an aristocrat. Jawaharlal, even though he was nearing thirty, still looked like a college student, youthful, vibrant and puckish.

The three Nehru girls were beautiful and, what is more, they were conscious of the sensation they caused. Jawaharlal himself, and some of his younger colleagues, however, preferred to hover around the girl volunteers, who had as head a Mrs. Khan who in beauty, charm and grace was almost incomparable. Except Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mrs. Annie Besant, conspicuous women in the Congress were still few, and most leaders were either widowers, or, if not single, rarely brought their wives with them. The feminine audience was huddled in a separate enclosure. Sex segregation was strictly enforced. Most women were covered in veils. It was more difficult to talk to a pretty girl than to obtain the autograph of a great leader. I little realized then that in less than two years I would be brought close to some of these great leaders, who then seemed to me giant-sized and remote like the distant hills in silhouette, or that sex segregation would break down and women would be struggling side by side with men in the national cause.

I was preparing for my Master's degree. Gandhi had changed from turban to a white cap. He was accompanied by Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali and Dr. Kitchlew. The Ali brothers with their trimmed beards, in their flowing kaftans, and their black fur caps displaying the star and the crescent, looked like Arab Sheikhs from Hedjaz. Gandhi seemed frail and puny in contrast. "I could carry him in my kaftan pocket," remarked the more corpulent of the two brothers. In the compound of a private bungalow, these leaders had been addressing meetings of College students. They had been appealing to us to relinquish our studies, and fight for "Khilafat" and the freedom of India under the banner of Gandhi. Even after a year, reclining in my deck chair, I could not explain how India's freedom got entangled with the "Khilafat". And yet the appeals were so soul-stirring and spellbinding that I lost my balance. I was the first to get up and offer to relinquish my studies. About a hundred more followed. A few thousands joined later. Gandhi who at Amritsar had fought for acceptance of the reforms had now decided to reject them. He had launched his movement of

non-cooperation, calling for the boycott of foreign cloth, of law courts and educational institutions, and of the forthcoming elections. He promised "Swaraj" in a year and the restoration of the King of Turkey as the temporal and spiritual head of Islam. He was so earnest and so convincing that at the time one believed that the British would be thrown out of India in twelve months.

Having taken the plunge, there was no going back. All the foreign clothes we had were cast into a bonfire. We took to *khadi kurtas* and pyjamas. Having left the boarding house, I had no place to go. Sarla Devi Chaudhrani in whose bungalow the Gandhi meetings were held took me under her wing. For sometime I and a few others stayed under her sheltering care. She was a great admirer of Gandhi. Her husband, a lawyer, was a Congressman of sorts. He was crude and violent of temper. He was even reported to beat his wife. Sarla Devi was much younger than her husband. She was a woman of rare grace and charm, and for her age still beautiful. To us she was more than affectionate, exhibiting a type of warmth and tenderness which with the maturity of later years I could only describe as born of domestic frustration. She suggested I take to work as Secretary to Gandhiji, as he would like to have someone from the Punjab. I readily volunteered. My apprenticeship, however, did not last long.

Nankana Sahib, seventy miles or so from Lahore, was a sacred shrine of the Sikhs. The Sikhs were trying to reform the Gurdwaras. A contingent of sikh volunteers was sent to Nankana Sahib to capture the Gurdwara and turn out the high priest who was leading a corrupt and dissolute life. The priest by a subtle ruse invited the contingent inside the walls of the temple and, when they were all asleep, his men poured quantities of kerosene oil in the precincts, and reduced several dozens to ashes. Gandhi undertook to visit the shrine after the tragedy, in the company of some other leaders. I accompanied him. Gandhiji and a few others sat in a congested third class compartment. In a neighbouring second class were comfortably seated the Ali brothers, Dr. Kitchlew, Dr. Mohboob

Alam and a few others gorging nuts and delicacies. Finding some excuse or the other, I spent most of my time in the second class compartment. At one of the stations Shaukat Ali commissioned me to get some meat, *chappaties*, *dal*, etc. for the party. The vendors realizing the importance of the leaders practically dumped the compartment with all kinds of available eatables. Gandhiji did not like this. After the leaders had visited the shrine, and had addressed a large meeting, local hosts invited them to an improvised meal. I readily joined the party, not knowing that Gandhiji and his close disciples were observing a fast. On the return journey I was commissioned to get fruits and tea for the party. Gandhiji had noticed everything! He felt that I was not the type to fit in with his standards of rigid austerity. Nothing was said, but another young man who had non-cooperated at the same time, Pyare Lal, was appointed his Secretary.

After some time Lala Lajpat Rai took charge of the movement in the Punjab. A special *ashram* was set up for student workers, to give us training in self-help and to prepare us for village work. While several thousands had left their colleges under the first impact of the freedom movement, only a hundred or so of us had finally decided to burn our boats. We slept on the bare floor on rush mattresses, using bricks as pillows. We did our own cleaning, sweeping and cooking. At first it was a torture. Then it became a pleasure. Finally in groups we left for the villages of the Punjab, to form Congress Committees, to spread the message of non-violent non-cooperation, to call people to discard foreign cloth, to wear *khadi* and to take to spinning. In the Northern districts which were allotted to my group, no one had heard about the Congress. Most people were dependent on government patronage. Very few understood what "Khilafat" had to do with "Swaraj" or vice-versa. In the beginning we were not taken seriously even by the authorities. Later the police began to harass and terrorise us. Finally roughs, toughs and hirelines were let loose to beat us up.

Typical of our early receptions was one which we received

in a village called Thatta, a great weaving centre in the North. The town was a little removed from the railway station. The local people put us on camels, and themselves followed on horses, mules and donkeys, with a party of village drummers leading the procession. At Rohtas near Jhelum river we had walked several miles through burning sand to reach the little township. Here one out of ten adults had been in the army, during the first World War. Every home had a couple of war widows in mourning. Almost the entire town flocked to our meeting. One of the speakers, a bearded *maulana*, kept the audience, mostly muslims, spellbound for hours. He however said very little about "Swaraj". He spoke all the time about the fate of muslim religious homelands in Arabia and West Asia. As the meeting was in progress, some hirelings started pelting stones and manhandling people in the audience. Suddenly from nowhere half a dozen sturdy men sprang up, lifted us up physically, put us in a cart and, before we realized what was happening, drove us off to an underground barnstead. Here we were offered sumptuous hospitality. In the dark barnstead, in the light of a few lanterns, we saw a large number of cattle and horses. There were several cots on which we spent the night struggling against flies and mosquitoes. We were escorted to safety next morning. We learnt later that we had been the guests of a gang of cattle lifters whose Chief had lost three sons in the war and had become a sworn enemy of the government.

At Bhawan, a terminal station on the road to the famous Khewra salt mines, we had quite a few frustrating and exciting experiences. At the invitation of some local people we reached the station at night. Finding no one to receive us, we lay down on the bare platform. From there we were shunted out by the police. We spread our bedrolls outside, only to discover in the morning that our soft mattress had been a layer of horse dung and hay! The place was used during the day as a stand for horse carts and tongas.

Going to the city we passed the dak bungalow. Here the elite of the city had gathered to welcome the Deputy Com-

missioner. He was proceeding by car to a neighbouring hill station for a holiday with his new bride. Under his orders the police had warned all the chief citizens against extending any kind of cooperation to us. Bhawan was a city where the head of every third family was a pensioner, a retired army or civil official, or who had relations employed in the government.

As we marched through the city with our soiled bedrolls, someone overturned a basket of refuse, leaving us smeared with dirt. In this state of distress we accidentally met one of my old college friends. He invited us to his house to clean up and have some food. We had washed and bathed, but before we could reach for food, which his mother had prepared, we heard the sounds of a whacking cane and the sobs and wails of our host. Half an hour earlier, his uncle had spoken to the Deputy Commissioner about him, about the family's services to the government, to solicit for him an important government job. The uncle had rushed back to the nephew, hearing from a police official that the young man was playing host to undesirables. We quietly sneaked out. We were again on the streets, with our bedrolls: terribly hungry. Everyone seemed hostile. Even the food vendors were reluctant to sell to us. We met another friend of my school days. He was later to become one of the biggest hotel proprietors in the country.³ He offered food and shelter.

The Deputy Commissioner meanwhile had left. The common people became responsive. We held a public meeting which was very well attended. Next day a group of tonga owners approached us for advice. The Deputy Commissioner had left behind basketfuls of presents, a load of provisions, pieces of heavy luggage and servants who had to be transported to the hill station. The police commandeered a few tongas to carry the load and the servants, free of charge. They had beaten up the tonga owners for refusal to do so. We advised them to go on strike in protest and not to take the load, even on payment, unless they were assured that the practice of free service would be discontinued. The police had no option since

³ M. S. Oberoi.

the provisions and the servants had to be transported. The strike was a great success. All the demands of the tongawallas were accepted. To celebrate the success we held a public meeting. The entire city turned out in the marketplace. Curiously enough the person who agreed to preside over the meeting was the uncle of my young friend who had been beaten up for playing host to us!

In the course of months we had become seasoned in the ways of village life, living in cattle sheds, paddling through sand dunes, and struggling with flies, bugs and mosquitoes. The big leaders however moved from city to city by cars, stopping briefly at villages only to address arranged meetings by the wayside. At their insistence we arranged a big conference in one of the affluent villages fifty-odd miles from Rawalpindi. Daultana was chosen because it had a fine grove of trees, under whose shade more than a few thousand people could be conveniently seated. It had also a derelict spinning mill where residential accommodation could be provided for the delegates. Then there were quite a few brick houses where leaders could be put up.

The railway station was connected with the village by an uneven marshy track: When the leaders and delegates arrived, they had to chose between walking through slush or using available transport.. We had assembled horses, mules, camels and a few bullock carts. After the leaders had negotiated a part of the distance by foot, and a few of them had their dhoties ripped by attempting a horse ride, most of them huddled up in bullock carts. Sarla Devi Chaudharani, as president, was offered a palanquin. She refused. She preferred a horse. A ripped sari and a bruised back finally dictated in favour of the palanquin where she lay nursing the bruises.

In the village, bathrooms and lavatories were unknown. The well provided for community bathing. The scrub and bushes served as natural lavatories. Most of the leaders, used to urban comforts and urban inhibitions, went without a bath. But public leaders could not be exposed to scrub and bushes. We rescued some broken chairs from the factory dump, ripped

their bottoms, and placed earthen pitchers under them to serve as commodes. The villagers laughed as we found shelters for these improvised toilets. Sarla Devi, who had taken to *khadi*, still preferred an elaborate "make-up". She created a minor crisis. Some village women rudely pulled at her hair to ascertain whether the curls were genuine. A few impishly inquired why she was rubbing chalk on her face, and whether it was to keep away the village dust.

The village conference, however, turned out to be a great success. I was soon promoted from a mere field worker to a junior leader. I was put in charge of the District Congress Committee of my home town and District. I was now able to address big and small public meetings, was invited to political conferences, where I could rub shoulders with some of the top leaders of the country. Instead of offering garlands, I now received them with a solemn bow of superiority. I even took to spinning and the demonstrative display of the *takli*,⁴ in imitation of the Gandhian cult. Barring Lala Lajpat Rai, the Punjab leadership was mediocre. Since I spoke fearlessly and with abandon, disregarding laws of sedition and other restrictions, I received more applause than many of the seasoned leaders. For that reason also I was in great popular demand. Where large village audiences were concerned I could now also employ effectively the village argot. Lala Lajpat Rai adopted me as his special protege. But even with Gandhiji, the Ali brothers, and others I became fairly intimate.

Months passed in which I and many others laboured hard, fearlessly and untiringly. But "Swaraj" was not in sight. There were whispers that some kind of gesture may be made by Lord Reading, the then Viceroy, since for the first time the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, was scheduled to visit India, in the autumn. Gandhi, however, decided to boycott the visit of the Prince of Wales. As a result the Government started wholesale arrests of all important workers. I had earlier obtained my passport, and at the advice of Lala Lajpat Rai had decided to proceed to the United States to study journalism.

⁴ A gadget for hand spinning.

I would have preferred the profession of law, in the footsteps of my father, but because of the boycott of law courts, that seemed out of the question. It was just by luck that I was able to escape to Karachi, before warrants could be served. I now found myself breathing the fresh air of the Arabian Sea. As I looked back, it did seem to me that for one so young, the years had been full of excitement and adventure. I had learnt more of life and people, in the school of experience, than I would have if I had been burning the midnight oil working for my Master's diploma!

2

A Voyage to the U.S.A.

I left by the SS City of London from Karachi and thence by the SS Olympic for New York. The City of London was mostly full of British army and civilian officials and their families returning home on holiday, or after retirement. There were only two Indians on the boat. The English passengers, within my hearing, were wont to make rude and insulting remarks against Gandhi and other Congress leaders. They characterized the non-cooperation movement as a mad venture of a few "blood-sucking" banyas and brahmins "to exploit the poor peasant and the untouchable". Gandhi was a *banya* by caste and the Nehrus were brahmins. Being alone I just listened, but could do nothing to express my resentment.

The British passengers were keen on offering *bon voyage* in various ways to the Prince of Wales. We were being constantly informed of his schedule, and were finally informed when the royal steamer and the City of London would almost come side by side in Port Said. As we came along, and the royal boat was steaming out of the harbour, our steamer offered several whistles, the deck bells rang, flags went up, and all the passengers came on deck to cheer the royal party. It was only after our boat had anchored that our Captain's attention was drawn to a sign pasted on cloth and nailed to the foreboard of the boat: "P of W Go Back". The Captain, the crew and my fellow-passengers all looked at the sign aghast, using the foulest language against the miscreant, deliberately accusing some of the Indian crew, yet all the time making it

obvious that they suspected me of this outrageous crime. The Captain lined up the crew and told them that anyone found guilty of disfiguring the ship or of seditious action would be tried and sentenced by the Captain, who had magisterial powers. After he had calmed down a bit after dinner, I walked up to the Captain and formally told him that I had made the sign and had stuck it and took full responsibility. I could see him collapse with embarrassment. He asked me to come up to the bridge. I was prepared for him to exercise his magisterial powers and to take appropriate action. Instead he begged me not to mention my crime to anyone, since he wanted the whole matter to be forgotten. My fellow passengers no longer made derisive remarks against Indian leaders in my presence and began to treat me with a certain deference as if to say, "Please don't do anything more desperate than what you have done."

I arrived in New York on a Saturday, sometime at the end of November when winter had already set in. As advised by Lajpat Rai, I had written in advance to the Society he had founded earlier, The Young India League, of my arrival. One of their representatives was at the docks to receive me. It was a great relief. I was thrilled at the sight of the Statue of Liberty. I had expected New York to be much smaller than London and at best something approximating to Plymouth or Liverpool. As I looked at the line of skyscrapers, rising like peaks shooting out of Manhattan island, I was paralysed with awe. The tallest in those days were the Woolworth, the Singer and the Flat Iron buildings. My chaperon had already arranged for me a cheap small room in a tenement to which I was duly conveyed.

My chaperon left me to unpack and relax, promising to meet me on Monday. Having finished unpacking, I left my room and the house in search of a cheap restaurant. My chaperon had particularly recommended a cafeteria in the neighbourhood. It was not difficult to locate the cafeteria and I found the food cheap and wholesome. Having never been used to self service, I also enjoyed the novel experience. As I emerged from the cafeteria and entered what I felt fairly cer-



tain was my street, and the house which seemed like mine, and even located in it my likely floor and room, I discovered that I had embarked on a wild goose chase. After having been kicked out from several floors and half a dozen tenements, I realized that all the houses in practically all the streets in this neighbourhood were in red brick, identical in design and architecture with nothing to distinguish them except their numbers. I had only cursorily noted the numbers, but figures have always cheated me. I lost my bearings completely. If I had seen a sympathetic face, I would have broken down in tears. I explained my difficulties to a passing policeman. He directed me to a police post from where I was duly conveyed to the Y.M.C.A. in the Bowery district of New York. At the Y.M.C.A., I was allotted a bed in a large dormitory. But my sleeping hours were restricted by the fact that the bed had to be vacated by six in the morning, when it had to be slept in by its second occupant — a worker on night shift.

I joined the Columbia University as an undergraduate, but soon discovered that I could be admitted as a post-graduate at the University of Michigan. So, after a month or so in New York, I left for Ann Arbor. The decision to take up journalism was dictated more by the compelling background of my political affiliations than by choice.

The few weeks I spent in New York were a great experience. As one who had recently returned from India and as it were from the very thick of the non-cooperation movement, I became for the Young India League a virtual show piece. The organization then was in the hands of a few enthusiastic young men. Some of them had outlived their academic age trying to earn their livelihood. Some were earning, learning and working for the organization. There were a few who while fighting for the freedom of India were trying to obtain United States citizenships for themselves. There were two other rival organizations working for India. The Indian Republican Party had a powerful Bengali membership. It had many leading lights, old revolutionaries who had found asylum in the United States. They had no faith in nonviolence, and believed

that a violent revolutionary movement, possibly aided by the enemies of Great Britain, could end British rule in India. There was a third organization claiming to be a branch of the Indian National Congress. But it is doubtful if it had any specific mandate from the Congress in India.

My first speech in New York was delivered under the "distinguished" auspices of the Young India League. I had been given two days' notice. Being my first performance, I laboured hard to prepare the speech. I virtually committed it to memory. The speech was to be delivered in Columbus Circus. I conceived it as a large "amphitheatre" of a discarded "circus". It turned out that Columbus Circus was only a sort of big square facing the Grand Central Park. This disappointed me. Five of us walked to the place of meeting. I had always seen "Leaders" even in my own country going to meetings in cars. This "walking" seemed unleader-like. At a certain point, my companions led me to the basement of a very tall building. I felt further depressed that the meeting was being held in a basement and not on any of the upper floor halls. We entered a barber's shop. I now felt confused. Probably some of my companions wanted to have a shave, or a hair-cut, and a general clean-up before going to the meeting. Practically all of my companions badly needed hair-cuts and one of them was positively feminine in his bobbing locks. I, of course, had carefully groomed myself already and had worn my best suit. My companions, to my surprise, entered a side alcove, paid one dollar to an attendant and were soon coming out with a large and heavy ladder in the carrying of which all of us helped. It was a double ladder almost ten feet in length.

We installed the ladder on one of the central footpaths of the Circus. One of my companions scaled the steps and began ringing a bell to attract the crowd. Two others unfolded a cloth sign and raised it on improvised poles. It was "India Calling"! A procession of Irishmen who were also mobilising American support for the Sinn Fein movement had just ended. Our bell call was intended to synchronize with the dispersal of the procession. Soon a few hundred people collected around

the ladder. The bell ringing stopped. The spare man who had been holding the ladder with me went up and in a powerful dignified speech announced the purpose of the meeting. He blatantly introduced me as the "right-hand man of Gandhi" who had "escaped from the savage clutches of the British" and had been able to reach the United States, after "dodging the British gestapo", to tell at first-hand the story of "British villainy and savage atrocities perpetrated on the people of India". My heart sank into my feet. I was as shocked at the brazen inexactitudes of my comrade, as I was depressed at the shape the meeting was taking. I had seen quacks selling their wares on street corners, but had no previous experience of making serious speeches from improvised ladders in the centre of a busy square in the noisiest city in the world. But the fat was in the fire.

After an initial period of embarrassment, I let myself go. Whether it was curiosity, or the impassioned tempo of my youthful voice, the crowd became larger and larger and more tumultuous in its applause, especially after, according to advice. I made flattering references to De Valera, Michael Collins and the Sinn Fein movement. I spoke for more than 40 minutes. Soon I found the ladder shaking under my feet. It appeared that one of the two comrades who had been holding the ladder had left the post of duty and was going about in the crowd passing his hat, appealing to the audience "to contribute freely to help to provide for the escaped right-hand man of Gandhi".

After the ladder had been duly returned to the barber's alcove, the leader announced that the "speaker" had been a good dollar-puller, and that a total of \$ 190 had been collected. According to the unprinted rules of the League, the speaker and the society divided equally between them fifty per cent of the collection. The balance was to be divided by the four helpers and companions for organizing the meeting, holding the ladder, carrying the sign, ringing the bell and passing the hat. I expressed a sense of shock at the whole procedure, the exaggerations and the inexactitudes and the charity appeal to

relieve "my indigence". My comrades just smiled and said, "You don't know America. If you don't use superlatives and inexactitudes you cannot stir the Americans. You cannot move them. If you do not make a collection they suspect that someone else is paying, and you are doing propaganda." The Americans will pay for a cause but resent propaganda. I must confess for a tyro my first speech in Columbus Circus was a thrilling experience never to be forgotten.

Christmas was approaching. Practically all of us joined the "Western Union" as errand boys. Our main function was distributing telegrams, collecting and distributing Christmas presents and flowers. The five dollars we received daily seemed to me a princely wage. I saw more of New York, its shadows and bright spots, in one month than many had seen in one year. I saved a substantial amount in the bargain.

One person left a deep impression on me during my short stay in New York — Syed Hossain. I had first heard Syed Hossain at the Amritsar Congress. He had a certain style, a peculiar grace, an attractive bearing, a knack of being always well dressed, even though not being always well provided for. He had a felicitous command of English. I heard him several times in New York and developed a great admiration for him. My first introduction to him was at my own initiative, in an Indian restaurant. Syed Hossain entered dressed in a tweed overcoat and an elegant custom-tailored suit, looking like a character from Hollywood. He sat down at the next table, pulled out a newspaper and began looking at the headlines. I went up to him and introduced myself as one of his admirers since the days of the Amritsar Congress. "If you are one of my admirers," he said, giving a broad smile, "sit down and take the privilege of ordering dinner for two." I really felt honoured and ordered an expensive meal for both of us. I discovered later that it was not very unusual for Syed to "invite" such hospitality from "admirers". One of the reasons why he frequented the Indian restaurant was that there were greater chances of meeting helpful "admirers" there than anywhere else.

After the spectacular ugliness of toy Everests of cement and stone that surrounded me in New York, Ann Arbor seemed to me a paradise. It was a clean, small, picturesque town with a richly verdured, undulating landscape, situated near the confluence of the Huron river and Lake Michigan. It reminded me of Srinagar. The centre of the town was taken up by the campus with large, Romanish, ivy-covered buildings belonging to various colleges, surrounded by an extensive stretch of small cottages with little gardens for the residence of students.

University life in the United States was very different from university life in India or for that matter Great Britain. The curriculum provided you with a rich diversity of combinations and enormous scope for specialization. The emphasis was not so much on the result of annual examinations, but on daily class work and originality and initiative. Libraries in American universities are the backbone of academic life, being extraordinarily well-equipped with books and reading material and offering great scope for extensive study in any subject. Part-time jobs were varied in character, requiring specialized skill or just physical effort. Some of the students actually went to work in factories during their vacations and did skilled engineering jobs at good payment. Some worked on the farms. At the University, boys worked as shop assistants, salesmen, barbers, cooks, butlers, waiters, errand boys, grass cutters, carpet cleaners, house painters, bricklayers, dish washers, window cleaners, floor scrubbers and even porters. I specialized as a dish washer and window cleaner. During holidays I could make additional income from odd jobs such as carpet beating, grass cutting and floor scrubbing.

I had by now got used to the sight of women moving about freely in the streets, hugging and kissing boy friends in parks or shady street corners. I had hitherto come in contact with them as waitresses, laundresses and landladies. But I had still not overcome the sense of isolation in which I had been brought up in my own country. I felt terribly shy even when talking to a waitress and for this reason generally ate in cafeterias.

Michigan was a co-educational university. Several thousand

young girls of my age went about the campus, laughing, giggling, flirting, completely carefree and thoroughly uninhibited by any of the consciousness of sex which weighed on my mind. While science and engineering colleges were predominantly, if not wholly, filled by boys, practically all the classes I was attending had a large proportion of girls, the girls sometimes being in a majority. For the first few days I just could not take my eyes off all the pretty faces in the class and even outside. I followed their gambols with hungry, sex-starved looks. After a time my sense of isolation broke down and I began to feel at home with the girl students. Coming as I did from a strange, distant country, I began to attract their curiosity and gradually enlisted even their interest.

It was a very pretty girl from a rich family who first encouraged me into lively personal conversation and enabled me to overcome my "shyness". I grew to like her very much, I spent a vacation with her family in a neighbouring town. I still remember how I was thrown into a cold sweat when she first caught hold of my hand. I felt almost tongue-tied with emotion. She encouraged me so much by her sweet intimacies, and occasional display of tenderness, that I felt I was in love, although I could not muster enough courage to give free vent to my feelings. One day when she was in a confessing mood, she disclosed to me that I was one of her valuable "hobbies" and she was going to miss me very much when I left for India. One of her other "hobbies", it appeared, was a blind musician, whose family had since moved into a distant town. Her next one was a girl student from Turkey who had introduced her to Islam and to Turkish food. She had also evinced interest in a boy from China and was still going steady with him, keeping as it were three "hobbies" on a string at the same time. But I was, she told me, different. I belonged to the distant and ancient country of India, known for its snake charmers, tigers, vogis and strange gods and goddesses. I could help her so much to enlarge her knowledge of the queer customs of my country and tell her of princes and princesses. American girls are quite capable of such emotional disinterestedness, and have hence a

more graduated approach to sex and love than girls anywhere in the world. It took me some time to understand this phase of American psychology and to adjust myself to the various grades of relationship between boys and girls at the university. I soon had many friends and I felt neither isolated nor lonely.

After taking my Master's degree in journalism and working as an apprentice in two papers, I returned to India. I was then twenty-three. During my absence the non-cooperation movement had fizzled out without "Swaraj" being in sight. Gandhi and several of the leaders were in prison. The Congress had succeeded in effectively boycotting the first elections to the legislatures created under the Montford Constitution. A very large number of voters had kept away from the polls and none of the known nationalists had sought election. The legislatures had, however, functioned for three years and Congressmen were now divided as to whether they should continue the boycott or fight the elections if only to keep out the stooges and the loyalists. The "no-changers" wanted to continue the boycott and were led by Rajagopalachari, Mohammed Ali and several others who claimed to speak the mind of Gandhi. The "pro-changers" were led by Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das. They advocated the capturing of the legislatures and carrying on the fight from within. As the elections drew near the two wings split. Motilal, Das and their followers fought the elections under the banner of the Swaraj Party and swept the polls. The no-changers continued the fight from "without" but their activities progressively diminished. The centre of conflict shifted to the legislatures.

3

From Aphrodisiacs to Editorship

Disillusionment and frustration awaited me on my return. There were only a few daily newspapers in the country with a mentionable capacity to employ an academically trained journalist. Some of the editors I met doubted whether my possession of a Master's degree in journalism entitled me to any preferential consideration over unpaid apprentices who were endeavouring to pick up the rudiments of the profession under actual "working conditions". The financially affluent papers, like *The Times of India*, Bombay, *The Statesman* in Calcutta, *The Pioneer* in Allahabad, *The Civil & Military Gazette* in Lahore and *The Mail* in Madras, were owned by British interests. Apart from their rich capital resources, they received special advertising patronage from the Government and the European mercantile community. They paid good salaries to their top men, but these top men were mostly Britishers. Besides, my American training was not in accord with the conservative British technique of editing and presentation of news. In fact, even the Indian-owned dailies followed the British pattern. The cover pages of all the newspapers were devoted to advertising. The more important the news the more deeply it was embedded inside the folds of the newspaper. Headlines were looked upon as merely a mechanical device to build up a particular pattern of display than to emphasise the contents of the report. The discovery of a new species of rose could quite likely take the top of the column while a train disaster involving several lives could be lost somewhere at the bottom. Finding what was

important or otherwise was left to the initiative and patience of the reader. It was assumed that the reader sat down with his paper to finish it from beginning to end.

My American training, therefore, was unhelpful even where Indian newspapers were concerned. For three years I was driven from pillar to post, trying to find a steady job, and struggling at various devices to make a living. My second job took me to Calcutta where C. R. Das was planning to start *Forward*, a daily paper which later changed its name to *Liberty*. It was to be an out-and-out Congress paper and the prospect appealed to me. I worked hard, sitting on broken chairs and soap boxes converted into tables, preparing the format of the paper and received flattering compliments from my immediate in command, a remarkably dynamic personality, young Subhas Chandra Bose, and the chief boss, the great leader of Bengal, Chittaranjan Das. But the salary offered was not enough to feed a cow.

My next job took me to Lahore where a daily paper had recently been started with all the attributes of being progressive and where my foreign training did have scope for appropriate expression. The founder was a Socialist leader of agreeable, though volatile, temperament. He had spent several years in England and was himself a brilliant speaker and writer.¹ I shared his spacious house, ate out of the same kitchen, had the benefit of sharing his car and occasionally could draw on some cash, if available, to meet miscellaneous expenses. The paper lived so much on credit that even where some of the less fortunate employees were concerned, there was a wide margin between the salary fixed and the salary actually available. Even then it was a joy to work, and to produce the paper, and to be able to express oneself not only in views, but also in technique, even though the mechanical and financial resources were depressingly inadequate. The paper gained in considerable popularity and influence, but the margin between credit and cash finally reached the bursting point and I had to seek "pastures new".

¹ Dewan Chaman Lall.

After a brief toiling period preparing sales copy for appetizers and aphrodisiacs, the portals of respectability opened to me. I got a job as a professor. Whatever respect I had for the prevailing system of education as a student vanished during my brief experience as a teacher. Students studied for a degree, and not so much for knowledge. The professors mastered the art of manufacturing graduates instead of helping in the development of scholars. Knowledge was imparted in easily digestible potions and greater reliance was put on memory than on understanding.

At the age of twenty-six, destiny opened to me the gates of the profession for which I had trained and equipped myself. I became the editor of *The Hindustan Times*.

The Hindustan Times had been started two years earlier by a dynamic section of Sikhs, which went by the name of Akalis, who had powerful affiliations with the Congress. K. M. Panikkar, a graduate from Oxford, who had earlier joined the non-cooperation movement, became its editor. Heavy losses compelled the Akalis to sell the paper to a group of Congress leaders, with a bias for Hindu revivalism, headed by Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Lajpat Rai.

Editing an infant paper from the Capital was a difficult and uphill task. *The Hindustan Times* was the only paper in the Capital. With its management were associated outstanding personalities. But the chief handicaps were a chronic shortage of funds, an underpaid staff, and old machines.

Apart from having a larger, more well-paid and seasoned staff, the rival papers had costly machines, and at their head veteran editors who had lived through several years of national history. They had created a certain reader loyalty for their style and opinions. Editorials in those days interested readers even more than news. The editorials of the major Indian-owned papers covered the entire five columns of a page. Kalinath Ray, the editor of *The Tribune*, and Chintamani of *The Leader* sometimes devoted a whole page to one subject. Mohammed Ali in his weekly was sometimes wont to carry a single editorial into two or three issues. I concentrated on short, forthright, well-studied editorials, devoting the rest of my time and space to

building up other features in the newspaper. In due course readers began to appreciate the new style and the vigorousness with which I expressed myself.

Even though some of the veterans continued their prolix disquisitions, the short, pointed, direct, vigorous editorial became increasingly popular with writers and readers alike. Reporting also became less mechanized and more personalised. The search for human interest, for distinctive angles, for scoops, increased and a new class of reporters with a keener sense for news and a brighter style in expression grew up all over the country.

Being the editor of the only English daily paper in the capital, I had extraordinary opportunities of meeting and knowing most of the celebrities with many of whom I developed informal and friendly relations.

4

Delhi in the Twenties

New Delhi was still in the process of being built. The Secretariat, the Parliament House, quite a few official buildings and residences had been completed. But it was sometime in 1927 that the Government completely moved out of Old Delhi. The Viceroy's House was officially occupied by Lord Irwin in 1928. He succeeded Lord Reading.

Delhi had a population of less than 400,000. The old city was practically confined within the Moghul-constructed wall which still exists in places. There was a great deal of exclusiveness between officials and the general run of citizens. European officials virtually lived in complete isolation, and mixed, generally, only among themselves. Delhi still retained a large nobility and preserved some of the traditions of the Moghul court. Even watch repairers and water carriers claimed royal blood and drew a monthly pension from the Government treasury. The *elite* were mostly property owners tracing their lineage and benefactions to the Moghul court or to those who served the British during and after the revolt of 1857. They lived and dressed in the traditional style. Except for making periodic calls on local officials in accordance with a well-designed order of precedence, they spent most of their time and spare money in diversions traditional to court life. Cock-fighting and quail-fighting were still popular and fashionable. Gambling had been varied by an additional accomplishment in bridge and poker. Plurality of wives was still customary, but it was deemed fashionable to have a mistress, preferably one who was accom-

plished in the graces of traditional hospitality and in music and dancing. While wives lived in seclusion, it was usual for the elite to invite their mistresses to entertain distinguished guests. These guests were often high European officials. The mistress in fact helped to do a great deal of "public relations". The nobility made a distinction between education and culture. Very few among them had the patience or the intelligence to pursue a full university course. But they spent a great deal of time reading, reciting or even composing poetry, acquiring some of the social graces which had been passed down by tradition and trying to understand and appreciate the finer points of music and dancing. It was in fact customary for parents to send their adolescent boys to their mistresses or to the homes of approved dancing girls to learn these social accomplishments. High officials, dancing girls and mistresses were attractions around which the social life of the nobility moved. Very few of the nobility were on the visitors' list of the Viceroy or even of the members of the Viceroy's Council. Their most cherished desire was to be known to the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner and to be permitted to pay weekly or monthly calls on days fixed for this purpose.

In Delhi's social life, great emphasis was laid on sartorial forms. Most of the nobility wore traditional formal dress at all official functions or even when calling or attending on officials. The officials themselves observed sartorial conventions meticulously. To be seen at dinner without tuxedos, even though eating with one's wife, was to be caught naked. On more formal occasions the bureaucrats appeared in tails.

The Hindus and the Muslims were fairly evenly divided in the population and lived in well-defined sectors of the city. The communities had lived in neighbourly harmony till the early 'twenties. Non-cooperation was now practically dead. In the absence of any active programme to sustain mass unity, after the fizzling out of non-cooperation, communalism began to raise its head. For centuries Muslims had offered peaceful worship in their mosques but suddenly they became unduly sensitive to the sound of music. Every time a procession was to

be taken out with music in front of a mosque, the whole city had to be on the alert against the danger of a possible riot. The Muslims considered the killing of a cow, especially as part of the annual sacrifice during Bakr Id, as a right, and sought Government protection.

I vividly remember my first Bakr Id in Delhi. Very few reporters were willing to take risks during these critical periods. I had, therefore, to proceed to the field of battle myself. The sacrificial cow was to be led in procession to the slaughter house through a four-mile route, passing through the most congested and heavily populated parts of the city. The route was lined on both sides by thousands of excited Hindus and Muslims, each community by some well-understood arrangement keeping to a specified part of the street. Hundreds of policemen armed with bayonets, bludgeons and lathis paraded the route. Officers in cars, on motorbikes and horseback kept up a continual patrol of the area. I was invited to go in the car of one of the officers for safety. The cow was to be taken before eight in the morning. But it was actually nearing eleven when the group of butchers and an odd assortment of priests and Mallas came into sight. The cow chosen for the occasion was a depressing-looking animal with more bones than beef. It moved as waywardly and with as much nonchalance as scores of wandering bulls and cows which prowled about the route. The Muslim crowd invoked the blessings of God by shouting "Allah-u-Akbar" while the Hindus started rousing their own divinity by calling "Har Har Mahadeo".

After the procession had proceeded a mile and had reached the proximity of a mosque and a temple, a rain of brickbats and missiles fell from both sides. Several in the crowd had a free fight. A couple of shots were fired by the armed police. Order was restored and the "cow" procession started again on its assigned route. According to official information, a mile or so ahead there was a mixed Hindu and Muslim trading and residential centre in proximity to the quarters of mill hands. The two parties had collected daggers, lathis and even guns and had prepared for a big fight. The policemen there were not

scattered but were stationed in groups, headed by a possé of armed men at every place of vantage. As the cow procession moved in, the usual slogans rent the sky. Then started a rain of brickbats and empty bottles. In a very few minutes men armed with lathis and daggers emerged from all sides and a fierce battle was joined along more than a furlong of the route. For more than half an hour the battle continued. From some of the projecting housetops bullets were fired into the crowd. After several heads had been broken and many had been wounded, the mounted police charged at the crowd. People began to run in all directions and several were crushed in the mêlée. Within a few minutes the road was clear. The processionists emerged from their positions of vantage and safety to continue the march. It was, however, suddenly discovered that in the confusion the cow had bolted.

Communal hatred had spread all over the country. There were riots in Lahore, Calcutta, Bombay, Nagpur, Patna and Allahabad, to mention only some of the large towns. Someone in Lahore had published a book, *The Colourful Prophet*. This offended the Muslims. The author was murdered in cold blood. The murder led to a turmoil in the city and for several days disorder continued, resulting in acts of murder, rioting and arson.

Every day reports started pouring in of large-scale conversions and counter-conversions in which sometimes whole villages were involved. Swami Shraddhanand, the great Arya Samaj leader, who had shown distinguished courage while leading a procession protesting against the Rowlatt Act in Delhi years ago, had been taking a leading part in the conversion movement. One of his converts was a very attractive Pathan girl, who took shelter in his house. The Muslims alleged that she had been seduced or kidnapped. It was in this state of tension that a Muslim, Abdul Rashid of obscure status, visited Swami Shraddhanand at his house, offering himself for conversion. As Shraddhanand got up to receive him, the Muslim pulled out a knife and after inflicting several injuries

murdered the Swami in cold blood. The assailant was apprehended and handed over to the police.

The assailant was tried, sentenced to death and hanged. His body was handed over to his relatives on the express undertaking that it be buried in the burial ground opposite the jail. A large police force armed with bayonets stood outside the jail, ostensibly to insure that the body was duly buried according to instructions. But a large crowd made a rush for the bier, carried it unmolested through the serried ranks of the armed police and made for the city. As the crowd entered the city gates, thousands more of Muslims joined in. For nearly three hours confusion and turmoil prevailed. Police were nowhere to be seen. Hindu shops were looted and burnt. Stray Hindus and Muslims were waylaid and beaten up. A common murderer had been canonized as a saint!

In this atmosphere of Government favouritism and sectarian hostility, it was easier for a Hindu than for a Muslim to keep to his moorings of nationalism. It was therefore all the more creditable for Delhi to have quite a few Muslims who stood steadfast, and gave a cold shoulder to communalism. Ajmal Khan was a distinguished Hakim. He commanded considerable social influence and enormous personal popularity. Ajmal Khan's ancestors had come to India from Persia with Emperor Babar, and had seen the rise and fall of the Moghul Empire. The family along with other nobles had undergone terrible persecutions, during the 1857 uprising. When the "Khilafat" and the non-cooperation movements were launched, Ajmal Khan was one of the first to discard all British titles and honours and to plunge headlong into the movement. There was something grand, noble and majestic about Ajmal Khan. He was gracious, generous and almost French in his politeness. Above all, he was tolerant and even suffered fools. His hospitality was proverbial and there was scarcely a family in Delhi, rich or poor, which did not have someone who had not been successfully treated by him and did not hold him in high esteem.

Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari was also a doctor by profession, the

scion of a very old family of immigrant muslims. He shared in ample measure the kind and generous nature of Ajmal Khan, his princely hospitality and his incorruptible patriotism. Ansari, having obtained an M.D. from London University, had acted as house physician in one of the best London hospitals. He commanded a very high place in the profession in India. Several Indian rulers and many high Government officials were among his regular patients. The freedom of India was always with him paramount. He had the rare capacity of winning and retaining the loyalty of followers, and very soon attracted around him a coterie of young progressive Muslims, some of whom continued steadfastly to struggle for the freedom of India. While by no means an extremist by temperament, he kept aloof from the legislative programme of the Congress and, during these days of discord, turned all his efforts to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. Thanks primarily to his initiative at various intervals, about half a dozen unity conferences were held in less than three years, ending in the framing of the Nehru report.

Asaf Ali was another distinguished Muslim. He was learned without being erudite, dignified without being profound, friendly without drawing too much on sincerity, courageous without any element of daring. He was an effective speaker and conversationalist without believing in the virtue of brevity. To put it more bluntly, he could never hit the nail on the head, but achieved the same object by devious means. The tongue of slander had tainted his earlier career, and even though since I knew him, up to his dying day, he lived a life of singleminded devotion to the national cause, he could not for many years during the struggle outlive this slander or the malevolent whispers which repeated it. Mohammed Ali who was a neighbour of Asaf Ali, and had a vitriolic tongue, spared no opportunity of repeating the charges against him.

The Ali Brothers had made history during the "Khilafat" movement. Mohammad Ali was a scholar, equally fluent in English and in Urdu, and a versatile writer in both languages. At one time they were so close to Gandhi that the Mahatma

claimed that if he wore pockets, one brother would be in his right and the other in his left pocket. When communal riots started, and the unity which the "Khilafat" and non-cooperation movements had forged came under strain, the Ali brothers raised the cry that for them and for Muslims Islam came first, and India next. Thus the two brothers started spearheading the cause of Muslim communalism, while continuing to pay lip service to the cause of Indian nationalism.

The Hindu leadership was made up of the mediocre. Among the younger generation one met some very fine specimens. Satyavati, a grandniece of Shraddhanand, was the mother of two children. She had been brought up according to the conservative traditions of the Arya Samaj and was married to a junior employee in a local mill. The care of children, her husband's very limited means, her conservative upbringing were all against her active participation in public life. Such was the magic in Gandhi's leadership and appeal that in the course of years she became the most powerful figure in the Delhi Congress and also one of the most respected leaders in Delhi, if not in the country.

Deshbandhu Gupta had non-cooperated as a student. He was now the editor of *Tej*, which had been started by Swami Shraddhanand, with whom he shared deeply his ardent patriotism, but only grudgingly his narrow loyalties to the Hindu community. All his life Deshbandhu had to struggle hard balancing patriotism against the claims of the community. Lala Shankar Lal combined business with politics, and had made a success of both. He held extremist views but was moderate in action.

Unlike Bombay and Calcutta where a powerful business community existed and could act with considerable amount of independence, Delhi's chief industry was Government whose employees formed the main nucleus of social life. In no city in the world was the Government clerk so much of an institution as in the capital of India. His whole life centred round time-scale promotions and ploughing through files, with one eye to the clock. The average Government clerk, by tradition and

make-up, was entirely impersonal in his attitude towards the affairs of the country. Another important factor in the population of Delhi was the *chaprasi*. Dressed in a variety of liveries, distinctive of the different *echelons* in the Secretariat hierarchy, the *chaprasis* spread like locusts in the main corridors of all Government offices. Nothing could happen or move in the Secretariat without their aid. The *chaprasi* was all powerful and all knowing. He knew all about promotions and demotions even before they were decided upon. If illicit money had to be passed and the officer was willing, the *chaprasi* generally acted as the safest channel for such transactions. A *chaprasi* was a handyman, a domestic help, a junior personal assistant, and an informant, rolled into one.

Members of the Civil Service, Britishers or Indians, were all cut to a pattern. In order to conform to the standards set up by the British, the Indians tried to be more impersonal, synthetic and stiffnecked than the Britishers. They dressed and behaved like Britishers. They struggled hard to speak Hindustani like a Britisher. Most of them succeeded only in speaking English as if it was Hindustani and vice versa.

Jobs in the civil service were so secure, the emoluments so generous and the prestige so great, that most of the finest Indian talent was drawn to the Civil Service and served to run and perpetuate the official machinery. The normal run of Indian Civil Servants were devoid of any live sentiments, although they took a keen interest in helping any agitation aimed at "Indianization" of the official machinery. Even more grotesque and farcical than the husbands were the attempts of the wives of Indian Civil Servants to ape western manners and western ways of life. The vogue of the lipstick, mascara and rouge had just been introduced, and irrespective of age it became a ritual for civil servants' wives to employ freely these accessories of fashion, appearing in a state of "technicolour" which would have made the chorus girls of Broadway blush. To this was added a plunging "V" neck which, without the benefit of "Bras" and corsettes, lent a Mae West effect to matrons more amusing than exciting.

5

“Swaraj” by Speeches

The Centre had two legislatures which met in Delhi—the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State. The Government held a majority in both through a solid bloc of official and nominated members. The Council of State was a sort of upper chamber whose non-official members were chosen by a process of indirect election, leaving very little chance for independents or nationalists to secure membership. It consisted mostly of hand-picked, dependable, elderly politicians. It was humorously referred to as the “museum of political fossils” or the “Pinjrapole”.¹ The Legislative Assembly had a much larger proportion of non-official and elected members, although, unless some of the nominated non-officials joined them, they could never muster a majority vote against the Government. Seats were reserved on a community and sectional basis. Elections were direct but by separate electorates. The electorate itself was limited in numbers. Even then after boycotting the first elections in 1920, the Congress, first as the Swaraj Party, and later under its own label, was able to capture a large majority of seats in the '23 and '26 elections. In the '26 elections, the independents as a party split into the nationalists and the Muslim League. The nationalists were right-wing Congressmen with a pro-Hindu bias. The Muslim League party consisted only of Muslims and had as its objective the safeguarding of the interests of the Muslim community.

¹ Pinjrapole in India is supposed to be a sort of home for old cows and oxen.

Jinnah, the leader of the League Party, was born a Muslim, but never observed any of the Islamic rituals. He was essentially a politician and had no live consciousness of religion.

Malaviya, the head of the Nationalists, was cast in a different mould. He was an orthodox Hindu, but extremely tolerant and catholic where other people's susceptibilities were concerned. The only reason why he did not go the whole hog with Gandhi in his undiluted nationalism was his fear that, in trying to boost and favour the Muslims, the British may unduly repress the Hindus. In Lajpat Rai, Jayakar, Kelkar and Aney, he had powerful stalwarts sharing his Hindu bias.

Motilal Nehru was the leader of the Swaraj Party and later of the Congress Party. It was his genius and discipline which forged the weapons whereby the Congress opposition battled with the Government from within the legislatures, sometimes defeating the Government with the help of other non-officials, periodically registering frustration and despair by walking out of the Assembly in protest, and all the time trying to create an atmosphere of political paralysis for the new constitution.

Motilal was far above the normal run of civil servants who sat on the Treasury benches. He never hesitated to express his disdain for the small minds which had been commissioned to run the affairs of a great country. Motilal was not a great orator, but was certainly a fine advocate. He knew how to make a point and compel conviction. Religion had no appeal for him, although he was very sensitive to ethical values. He abhorred hypocrisy and humbug and could not suffer fools. A man of great vivacity, with a fund of anecdotes and a considerable amount of wit and humour, he was also an engaging conversationalist.

There were in the Congress Party several others whose talents and capacity for persuasive speech gave the party its strength and fighting punch. Rangaswamy Iyengar, for sometime the editor of *The Hindu*, was a master of "Blue Books". Another master of "Blue Books" who studied hard and spoke loquaciously was Satyamurti. Shanmukham Chetty specialized in finance and spoke effectively. In facile oratory, ready wit

and vitriolic sarcasm few could excel Tulsi Goswami, a princely landlord of Bengal, Diwan Chaman Lal, a socialist of the old school from the Punjab, and Ranga Iyer. Tassadaque Sherwani and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai were Muslim stalwarts from the United Provinces. Tassadaque Sherwani was a speaker of great persuasiveness and unusual dignity. Kidwai was essentially a man of action. As a whip of the Congress Party, the originality of his manoeuvres confounded the Government on many occasions and brought it several humiliating defeats.

Political acumen, intellectual ability, oratorical capacity and talent of a high order, were by no means confined to the Swarajists. Among the unattached there were some very brilliant men. Sir Hari Singh Gour was a short, stout bullet-headed man with a squeaky voice, possessing half a dozen doctorates in law and literature from various foreign universities. Sir Henry Gidney, the representative of the Anglo-Indians, had a delightful sense of humour and a capacity for quick repartee. Kabiruddin Ahmed was not brilliant, but an embarrassing heckler. He was a comic figure with his spats, gray morning suit, white hat and a very dark complexion. He liked a joke at his expense.

It was, however, the personality of Vithalbhai Patel, deputy leader of the Swaraj Party who succeeded Sir Frederick Whyte, a British parliamentarian, as the first Indian non-official "Speaker" of the Legislative Assembly, which dominated the proceedings and created situations both baffling and perplexing to the Government benches. While maintaining a completely non-partisan attitude and preserving the dignity and integrity of his high office, he made full use of his position to confound the Government and create critical situations for enlarging the scope of his own powers.

Tall, partly bald, with a long grey Bishop's beard, Vithalbhai Patel presided over the deliberations of the Assembly with great dignity, maintaining a mischievous squint in his left eye, creating the impression of a designing Machiavelli. He was more a purposeful speaker than a brilliant one. He was lofty without being spiteful, fearless without being indiscreet and

cunning without stooping to anything mean. Even before he became "Speaker" of the House, his mastery of constitutional procedure was outstanding. Gandhi once remarked that, given an opportunity, he had the mystifying quality of creating a deadlock on a point of order anywhere. He could so use the flaws in a constitution as to make it unworkable.

Vithalbhai and his equally illustrious brother Vallabhbhai were born in a family of five brothers and one sister. Vithalbhai was the third son and Vallabhbhai was two years younger. The family owned ten acres of land in the village of Karamsad in Ahmedabad. The father Jhaverbhai and all the sons helped in tilling the land, living a life of abstemiousness and austerity. Jhaverbhai still recalled memories of the great rebellion of 1857 in which, in his early twenties, he had joined the forces of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi to drive the British out of India. He often expressed the hope that his sons would in their time achieve what the revolutionaries had failed to accomplish in 1857. Vallabhbhai inherited from his father an implacable will, a deep sense of dedication, and moral discipline. The Patidars, as these landowners were called, were men of strong passions and high tempers. So was Vallabhbhai. They were also adepts in political manoeuvreing, had a natural gift for diplomacy, and resourcefulness. Vithalbhai was consummate in all these qualities. In fact it was never easy to probe the inner workings of his inscrutable mind. Vithalbhai was married at the age of nine. Vallabhbhai at the age of sixteen. Both became widowers in later life. Vithalbhai was more fond of sports than books, although in due course he riggled through high school and later qualified for Law. Out of his earnings, he helped Vallabhbhai to go to England to become a barrister. Vallabhbhai returned and started practising in Ahmedabad where he was soon recognised as an able lawyer and a member of the smart set. He brought with him, according to one biographer, "stylish suits and hats, a taste for cognac, and the habit of chain smoking". Soon both brothers rose high in the profession. While Vithalbhai was greatly respected for his courage, his capacity for sacrifice, and his abilities, his inscrutable ways, and his un-

predictable loyalties, prevented him from ingratiating himself with his top colleagues. In fact Motilal and others proposed his name as Speaker, more to get rid of an inconvenient associate, than because of any comprehension of his great subtlety of mind and extraordinary resourcefulness. The status, powers and the position of the "Speaker" in the Legislative Assembly were patterned on the position of the "Speaker" in the House of Commons but were circumscribed by constitutional limitations, the very limitations which made the Legislative Assembly itself appear like a student's debating society in comparison with such a sovereign legislature as the British House of Commons. Vithalbhai realized all this and yet by judicious interpretation of his position, fearless discharge of his responsibilities and by creating perplexing deadlocks, extracted for himself powers which, though implicit in the Constitution, were never imagined to belong to his office.

When he called, in his drawling accents, "Order! Order!" there was a compelling majesty in his tone. Even though there were occasions when some of the pampered supporters of Government and officials wanted to be rude, they felt forced to obedience. It was on a procedural matter that he came into direct conflict with the Commander-in-Chief and won.

The Commander-in-Chief in those days was expected to be a member of the Legislative Assembly, in charge of Defence. Sir William Birdwood, the then Commander-in-Chief, after making his speech supporting the Defence Budget, left the House, as had been the custom with his predecessors. A non-official member drew attention to the absence of the Member for Defence, whose remarks were under debate. Vithalbhai declared that the Commander-in-Chief by absenting himself when his speech was under debate had done an act of discourtesy to the House. He called for his presence and for an apology to the Chair. British prestige could not tolerate such an affront. The Commander-in-Chief was next only to the Viceroy. Any apology by him would be the end of British authority and a terrible blow to military discipline. Sir William Birdwood, who was then in the lobby, quietly slipped away.

A representative of the Government informed the Chair that the Defence Member was not available. Vithalbhai declared that since a debate on the Defence Minister's speech had become unrealistic in his absence, he was adjourning the House, and the debate would be resumed when the Defence Member was present. The Government never expected the "Speaker" to pursue the position so fearlessly, to its logical climax.

It was rumoured that Sir William Birdwood felt affronted, and had offered to resign rather than face the humiliation of apologising to the Assembly and the Chair. Vithalbhai remained adamant. Finally some of the Indian members of the Government found a formula to save face. The Commander-in-Chief would return to the House and express regrets. The same day the "Speaker" would give a reception where he would show particular deference to the Commander-in-Chief to indicate that no insult was intended to his person. Rush invitations were sent out for the party. On the day of the party Sir William Birdwood walked into the Assembly after question time. He had barely risen in his seat to make his statement, when a brick loosened from the dome of the chamber, with a lot of debris, fell a few feet from the Commander-in-Chief. Some members on the Government benches feared that a time-bomb left in the ceiling had exploded. They ran for shelter to the lobby. It was later discovered that the masonry of the ceiling had given way, resulting in the accident. After this mild sensation, the Commander-in-Chief made a brief statement regretting his absence from the Assembly. He sat through the debate on the Defence grant. Never again was a Commander-in-Chief to be seen in the Assembly. The Government decided to replace the Commander-in-Chief by the Defence Secretary in the House.

On another occasion when the Swarajists had staged their first walk-out from the chamber, Vithalbhai Patel took the Government completely by surprise by declaring that since it was the duty of the Chair to see that all legislation was subjected to a full and fair debate and since such a debate would not be possible in the absence of the Opposition, the Govern-

ment should see to it that they did not introduce any controversial legislation. He had paralysed the administration for several days by giving this ruling.

In order to tighten security measures the Home Ministry which was in charge of guarding the legislature decided to implant armed policemen in uniform in the public galleries. A weaker person would have accepted this concern for security. Not Vithalbhai. He rose in his seat one day after question hour, and drew the attention of the House to the presence of policemen in uniform in the public galleries. The Chair as custodian of the rights and privileges of the Assembly was the sole authority to permit any strangers with or without uniform to any part of the House. He, therefore, ordered the policemen to clear out of the galleries. He then announced that since the Chair had not at its disposal a watch and ward staff to control entry and exit in the public galleries, the only course open to the Chair was to clear all the public galleries of visitors and keep them locked up, till he had at his disposal and under his control an adequate watch and ward staff. He ordered the Sergeant-at-Arms to clear the galleries and lock them up. After a few days the Government agreed to provide a watch and ward staff to the President and the deadlock was resolved.

The secretariat of the Assembly was in control of the Legislative Department while the President had at his disposal only a Secretary and the Deputy Secretary. Vithalbhai resented this duality which left him powerless even where the library of the Chamber was concerned. One day he reported to the House that he had required a book from the library to prepare a ruling and the Secretary of the Legislative Department, at that time Sir Lancelot Graham, had instructed the librarian not to issue the book and had made derogatory remarks against the President within the hearing of witnesses. For the derogatory remarks he asked for an apology from the Secretary who was also an official member of the House. As regards the book, he announced that in the absence of that book the Chair was not in a position to give the ruling and the House could hence not proceed with further business. But even if the book was now

available the chair would not give the ruling till steps were taken to prevent the repetition of such an incident. This could only be done if the Assembly had a separate secretariat directly under the President, had full control of the library and an appropriate sanction of money grant for the purpose.

The ruling created a sensation. It was freely asserted that Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, would compel the speaker to resign and the Government would not submit to this humiliation. The deadlock continued for several days. Vithalbhai stood adamant. Finally Vithalbhai won. The Government agreed to set up a separate secretariat for the Assembly under the control of the "Speaker". It was thus by clever but courageous manoeuvres, by relying on parliamentary precedents that Vithalbhai Patel enlarged the powers and status of the "Speaker". He compelled obedience by the officials to his rulings and did not spare the highest. Vithalbhai Patel had been a member of the Imperial Council during the years of the first World War before being attracted to Gandhi. He had given up a lucrative practice and had courted imprisonment during the non-cooperation movement. Even as President he set apart Rs. 2,000 every month from his salary for a trust, the administration of which he had entrusted to Gandhi. His crowning achievement was a record of victories over the Government for more and greater powers for the "Speaker" and the Assembly. And yet, Vithalbhai was a very lonely man. He had very few friends in private life. Even with Vallabhbhai Patel, his younger brother, the relations were not always cordial. Even Gandhi considered him a stormy petrel.

The Government and the Opposition were so well poised in the Assembly that the success or defeat of either side on any crucial occasion in the lobby depended on its ability to enlist uncommitted votes, a procedure which came to be known as "fish-catching". On the Government side attractive baits, like profitable contracts, high-salaried posts or titles were constantly kept dangling before the waverers. A powerful public opinion was the only pressure which the Congress party could bring to bear on non-officials and especially on the waverers.

Amusingly enough, some of the "waverers" voted with the Congress periodically, not out of patriotic conviction, but to "put up their own price". It was these unexpected "windfalls" which sometimes turned an anticipated defeat into an unexpected victory.

On crucial occasions even a few votes could be decisive, and both sides adopted all sorts of devices to win these votes. On two occasions invalids were brought on stretchers to vote. One of these, a Congressman from Sindh, actually died after the voting was over. Lawyers and doctors among members were paid fantastic fees for phoney cases and taken several miles outside the city, to be left in desolate areas to prevent them from voting on a particular day. Both sides therefore kept continuous vigil to ensure the presence of supporting members. On one vital occasion,² the official whips organized a non-stop bacchanalia of music, dancing, drinking and eating, lasting five days and nights. On the day of voting, one of the whips suffered a stroke standing on the floor of the House. Some Opposition members uncharitably remarked that he had paid for his sins. A non-official member was so drunk at the time of voting that he walked off into the opposition lobby, before the vigilant officials could stop him, and voted against the Government without any consciousness of the fact.

Speeches were the main source of sustained interest in legislative activity. Government spokesmen invariably read prepared speeches and worked laboriously to keep to opposition standards. But the standard of eloquence and intelligence of some of the top opposition leaders, especially on the Congress benches, was of a very high order. If "Swaraj" could be won by strong words, by cogent, well-reasoned and eloquent speeches, the Congress Party would have certainly succeeded. I do not think, in any legislature in the world, had the standard of debate been so high for such a long period as in the Legislative Assembly of India.

The first "walk-out" perhaps was the most spectacular and sensational of all, involving the longest absence of the party.

²The debate on the 1s 6d ratio question.

The Swarajist members entered the Assembly in their white *khadi* garments, *churidars*, *akhkans* and what not, with white "Gandhi caps", with Motilal Nehru at the head. They took their seats, the oath, and, after the formal business was over, Motilal Neiru got up in his seat and read a solemn, firm and dignified statement, declaring the purposes for which Congress had contested the elections, namely consistent and persistent opposition and non-cooperation with the Government from within the legislatures. It was the intention of the Swarajists, he said, to attend only to vote against the budget to throw out money grants, and otherwise to participate in any particular debate or voting, only when the interests of the country so required. Having said this, Motilal picked up his brief-case and with dignified contempt walked out, followed by all the members of the Swaraj Party. After that the Swarajists swarmed in the lobbies, but did not enter the house except on a few chosen occasions. Soon they began to suffer from ennui and frustration. In due course they started attending the Assembly and even to participate in the debates. The walkouts became only a periodic sensation.

On one occasion, after assembling all the support they could get, including the Independents, the Congress for the first time out-voted the Government, and threw out the budget. There was unbounded enthusiasm in the House. Members shouted "Inquilab Zindabad" and "Gandhi Ki Jai". There was a continuous clamour addressed to the treasury benches, "Get Out"—"Nobody wants you"—"Resign". There was booing, yelling and catcalls. Members threw their official papers in the air. Between the Swarajists and the Independents there was a lot of embracing and cordial jubilance. The scene was repeated with lesser enthusiasm every time the Opposition out-voted the Government. Each time the sense of frustration grew more acute !

The Government were not slow in taking advantage of this growing over-all sense of despair. The Government explored dents in the Congress armour. Congressmen were told by Government members to be "responsive" and "constructive".

6

Out of the Woods and Into the Trees

After rubbing heels in the legislatures and staging walk-outs for six years, the Congress leaders realized that, except for achieving some spectacular publicity, their speeches and their tactics had not yielded any substantial results. Their words had fallen on deaf ears. The Government cared very little whether they remained in, or stayed out of, the legislatures. Young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, etc. felt that, unless something desperate and spectacular was done, neither would the British wake up to realities nor would the aging Congress leadership overcome the spell of legislative activity. They had already set up a network of Youth Leagues and Kisan Sabhas in the country to mobilise the support of students, peasants and workers for the liberation movement. At the Madras Congress the younger elements put forward a resolution demanding that henceforward India's goal was to be "Complete Independence", not Dominion Status within the Commonwealth. While a hot controversy started within the Congress as to whether Independence or Dominion Status should be India's goal, within the Youth Leagues and, among students in particular, a feeling grew that non-violence may bring political concessions at great sacrifice, but was not likely to spur a revolution or achieve independence. Secret societies were revived all over the country.

Lord Birkenhead had meanwhile become Secretary of State

for India in a Conservative Cabinet. Lord Irwin had succeeded Lord Reading. F. W. Smith, before becoming a peer, was an outstanding lawyer, with whom both C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru had worked. Through common friends C. R. Das got the impression that Lord Birkenhead was keen on making a "bold" gesture to India, to win over the more sober elements in the Congress Party. To prepare the ground for such a gesture C. R. Das made a memorable speech at Faridpur (1925) at one of the provincial conferences, assuring Muslims of a fair deal on the one hand, and the Government on the other of a constructive response by the Congress if effective steps were taken to progressively establish "Swaraj within the Empire" in the country. After the Faridpur Conference, C. R. Das fell ill. Gandhi was expected for a Working Committee meeting in Calcutta. Das wanted to share with him his intuitive hope, and the preparatory steps that should be taken in anticipation. He asked him to come to Darjeeling. "You are in my jurisdiction. You have to include Darjeeling in your programme." Gandhi apologised, saying that his programme had been fixed and he was to attend the Working Committee meeting in Calcutta. The imperious Chittaranjan replied, "Then bring the whole Committee here." He was willing to play host, although he himself was at the time the guest of Sir Nripendra Sircar.

Gandhi spent a week with Deshbandhu. This was their last meeting. Das even imported a few choice goats from Jalpaiguri to provide fresh milk for Gandhi and his entourage. "I have an inner feeling," he told Gandhi, "that something big is going to happen." It was in this hope that Deshbandhu died.

Lala Lajpat Rai, who had employed his powers of speech successfully to embarrass the Government many times in the Assembly, also felt a few years later that British opinion was moving towards some kind of gesture to India, and that the deadlocks in the Legislature could not last long. He too, like Das, was feeling tired, exhausted and ill. Motilal shared their optimism.

The British Government finally made the "gesture". They announced the appointment of an all-white Royal Commission

under the Chairmanship of Lord Simon, to investigate, with the help of locally co-opted committees, what further measures of constitutional reform could be offered to India. The personnel, the terms of reference and the procedure laid down were all considered an insult to Indian opinion. The Congress and other progressive parties in the country decided to boycott the Simon Commission.

The Commission was greeted with black flags and cries of "Simon Go Back", wherever it went, by thousands of people.¹ Officials tried hard to offer welcome through hired men, but the very obvious character of these hirelings made the demonstrators look ridiculous. They also let loose a reign of dark terror, finding in every little incident an excuse for beating up non-violent crowds with lathis. In Lahore a procession headed by Lala Lajpat Rai was beaten up. Lajpat Rai was repeatedly hit on the chest. In Lucknow Jawaharlal and a few thousand others were trampled under horse-hoofs, hit with heavy lathis, and left wounded on the roadside. Govind Ballabh Pant received a head injury that left him a permanent invalid.

The Simon Commission turned hope into despair. Lajpat Rai reached Delhi a day or two after he had been assaulted. "Every lathi blow that has been inflicted on us today," he had said in Lahore, "is a nail in the coffin of the British Empire." I saw the abrasions and blue scars on his chest. But more even than the physical assault, he felt deeply affronted that a petty British Police Officer could, for no reason whatsoever, beat up a man of his status and position. Between Lajpat Rai and Motilal there had been serious political and personal differences for some time. They had not even been on speaking terms. Lajpat Rai asked me to arrange a meeting between them. Within an hour they met in cordial embrace, with tear-bedimmed

¹ At Delhi more than a hundred thousand people carrying black flags under our leadership had lined the route and surrounded the platform where the Simon Special arrived. Some excited young men flung their shoes, which fell onto the lap of a lady. "This is your non-violence", said Sir John Simon informally to Motilal. "When the police break the heads of leaders and trample people under horses' hoofs, do you expect drawing-room manners from them in return?" retorted Motilal.

eyes. A long conversation followed. Lajpat Rai pleaded with Motilal that it was time that India stood up for independence. "Jawaharlal and the younger leaders will have to carry on the fight," he said. "It is going to be a hard long-drawn-out struggle. They need our support, not our criticism." Lajpat Rai died a few days afterwards. Exactly a year later, Saunders, the petty officer who had beaten up the "Lion of the Punjab", was shot at and murdered, while leaving his office.

Sir John Simon was attending the Legislative Assembly. The Session itself was historic, since the speaker, Vithalbhai Patel, was to give an important ruling on a most controversial Bill. The Public Safety Bill had practically all the coercive features of the Rowlatt Act, and had been introduced to curb violent or other political activities considered undesirable by the authorities. The public galleries were packed. The House was full. After the usual question hour, Vithalbhai rose in his seat to give his ruling. In his familiar drawl, he called, "Order! Order!!" There was pin-drop silence in the House. Behind the silence was an acute feeling of tension, suppressed curiosity, and agitated emotions. After a few introductory remarks he said, "And now I shall proceed to give my ruling." There was the rustling of papers as he prepared to read his statement. One could see an amused grin breaking through his white flowing beard. There was a mischievous squint in his eyes. It was a sign that he would upset the Government by his ruling. In the momentary pause that followed, something like a ball was hurled down from the visitors' gallery. It exploded with terrific noise in the aisle a few feet from the front treasury benches. Suddenly the whole chamber was filled with smoke, and confusion. Then followed half a dozen revolver shots aimed at the treasury benches and the adjoining officials' gallery. In the smoke and confusion one witnessed the tall, majestic figure of Motilal Nehru fearlessly moving to the treasury benches to see what had happened. One even heard in a faint drawl, "Order, Order," from the Presidential Chair. Vithalbhai Patel continued to stand at his seat, looking the picture of perturbed dignity, as if to indicate that all that had happened was "out of order".

Members on the treasury benches were so stunned that only a few moved from their places. As for the back-benchers, officials and non-officials of all parties, there was a mad chaotic rush for the exits. A few fell down in the melee and were trampled upon by others. Hari Singh Gour, an Indian member of the Simon Commission, and one or two others who had associated themselves with the Commission, ran to the toilets and locked themselves in, thinking that some terrorists were out to make a concerted attack on the "Simonites". Sir John Simon himself, compelled by a similar fear, or at the advice of a Secretary, made a dash from the President's gallery to the nearest exit and then to the office of the Assembly Superintendent. We of the Press took cover behind our seats, while keeping our eyes glued on the floor and the galleries.

By the time the smoke cleared the visitors' galleries were practically deserted. Two young men, one tall and well built, the other short and delicate in physique, stood across one of the back seats in defiant dignity. A large number of policemen and officers had rushed to the gallery, but they all stood at a distance as if paralysed by the shock and unable to assess the situation or the risk. One of the young men boldly held out his revolver to the police. "Arrest us," said the second young man in a clear resonant voice. "We threw the bomb so that the deaf may hear. We have fired the last bullet. We did not come to kill but to warn." All eyes turned to the two visitors and the paralysed police squad. The police still had not moved. The young man with the revolver then smiled, and, shaking the weapon in his hands said, "Don't be afraid of this, it is empty, or it has got stuck. You can now place us under arrest." And with dignified abandon he threw the revolver on one of the empty seats and again repeated, "You have nothing now to be afraid of. We have no arms and no bombs." It was then that the police moved forward and the young men were placed under arrest, handcuffed, and with typical police rudeness marched off. The Assembly Chambers were sealed off, and a mad search for possible collaborators commenced. The police suddenly became extraordinarily active and aggressive.

The voice of despair and frustration of young India had spoken. As Bhagat Singh and Bhukteswar Dutt, the two young men, explained in their statement in court, the bomb was not intended to kill but to alert the British that any resort to coercive legislation or attempt to deal violently with non-violent leaders or non-violent protests, like the beating up of processions and demonstrations against the Simon Commission, would call for retaliatory violence. Bhagat Singh and Bhukteswar Dutt showed unusual courage and bold defiance during the trial and accepted the very heavy sentence cheerfully.

While Congress activity was practically concentrated on the boycott of the Simon Commission and active opposition to Government in the legislatures, Gandhiji suddenly realized that people were losing their faith in nonviolence as a means of national salvation and were inclined to acclaim acts of violence and treat those who committed them as heroes.

7

Call for Action

1929 like 1919 became crucial year in Indian history. Gandhi returned to the helm of affairs. Once again the non-changers and the pro-changers, the Swarajists and those opposed to Council entry, joined in a new bond of comradeship.

Council entry had lost its charm. Legislative opposition had become a farce. Younger men, impatient with the vocal exercises of the veterans, were calling for a more vigorous and more effective programme of action, and for a leadership that could stand the strain of such action. The Congress met at Calcutta. Gandhi put forward a compromise formula to settle the controversy of Independence versus Dominion Status, and to bridge the differences between the old guard and the younger leaders. The Congress declared that if within a year steps were not taken by the British Government to give India Dominion Status, the Congress would then hold out for full and complete independence.

Even though weak and disabled, the war horse was once again snorting and ready for action. Gandhi called for a nation-wide campaign for enlisting a million and a half members of the Congress. All over India mass meetings were held, where bonfires were made of mounds of foreign cloth. In Delhi we held a mammoth meeting.¹ This was addressed by Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Malaviya, then leader of the Congress Nationalist Party. Malaviya's party still maintained its separate entity. He advocated "Swadeshi" but was sentimen-

¹ I presided over the meeting.

tally opposed to bonfires of foreign cloth. After the meeting was over, the vast audience proceeded to Rajghat where we had collected a huge mound of foreign garments.² Pandit Motilal took Malaviyaji with him in his car. When they reached the site, Pandit Malaviya firmly requested to be sent home. He could not be party to setting fire to any cloth, when it could be usefully handed over to the poor. "But this would defeat the very purpose of this moral protest," pleaded Motilal. "What is bad for the rich cannot be good for the poor." Pandit Malaviya stayed on. Soon the mammoth crowd began shouting: "Inquilab Zindabad", "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", "Motilal Nehru Ki Jai", and under some secret advice roared: "Pandit Malaviya Ki Jai, Malaviya Zindabad." Motilal, with impish confidence and after a brief speech, announced that the bonfire would be lit by the "sacred hands of Pandit Malaviya, than whom there is no greater patron of Swadeshi, nor a more devoted patriot and courageous leader in the country." I was astounded! I saw Malaviya taking the torch in his hands, making a brief but stirring speech and then advancing to light the bonfire! The spell cast by the mass of people was sometimes stronger than sentiments. I felt it all the more with the passing of time. A cheering crowd could send more people to prison than the speeches of leaders!

Gandhi meanwhile started negotiations at the topmost level, to test whether after the Simon Commission disaster there had been any change of heart on the part of the British. Lord Irwin, the new Viceroy, was a Conservative, but liberal in his approach to the Indian demand. In England a Labour Government with Ramsay McDonald as Prime Minister, and Wedgewood Benn as Secretary of State, had replaced the Conservatives. This raised hopes among moderate elements of some satisfactory moves to meet the Indian demand. In these negotiations Jinnah as head of the Muslim League assumed an importance out of all proportion to his influence, because the British found him useful and helpful, though at times annoying. As negotia-

²This was my second bonfire. After this the first time I wore anything but khadi was in 1948 when I went to the United States.

tions proceeded, Jinnah put forward his famous fourteen points, almost thirteen of which Gandhi willingly conceded. But to accept the fourteenth, i. e. separate electorates for communities, would have amounted to a denial of joint nationalism for which Gandhi and the Congress stood. The fateful and final meeting of the year was held at the end of December. The meeting was fateful because when the Viceroy's Special was speeding Lord Irwin to Delhi for this meeting, a bomb exploded on the railway line, just opposite the Old Fort, blowing up a part of the dining car. No one was injured. As an explosion this was as well planned as the earlier bomb in the Assembly. It resulted in no loss of life, but to a tremendous public furore.

The Viceroy announced the calling of a Round Table Conference, of representatives of all parties, including the princes, to discuss an agreed future constitution for India. The Viceroy supported this announcement with an appeal to leaders of all parties to get together and prepare for the Conference. As regards Dominion Status, the declaration was cunningly worded: "In view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and in India regarding the intentions of the British Government in enacting the statute of 1919, I am authorised," announced Lord Irwin, "to state clearly that in their judgment it is implied in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status...."

As editor and as a progressive Congressman, I reacted very unfavourably and exposed its calculated vagueness. While not denouncing it outright, my paper demanded that the assurances should be more clear-cut, before it could become the basis of any further negotiations. Younger leaders congratulated me on my firm stand. Pandit Malaviya and Pandit Motilal considered the denunciatory tone premature. Even Gandhi and Jawaharlal were taken in by the declaration, and actually joined several others in publishing a joint manifesto "welcoming" it. We had a hard time toning down our

views to come in line with this unexpected change of attitude on the part of those who should have known better.

Even though these leaders were taken in at first, it did not take long for the gilt to wear off the ginger bread. A storm was let loose in Britain by the Conservatives, and the supporters of the Simon Commission recommendations, against the declaration. The Labour Secretary of State, Wedgewood Benn, explained that the concept of Dominion Status was implicit in the announcement of 1917, made by the Lloyd George Government, and that in India Dominion Status had been already "in action", in so far as an Indian had signed the Treaty of Versailles.³ The Viceroy could go no further than to assure that there would be no limitation imposed on the Conference, but the nature or the results of the Conference could not be anticipated by him.

The moderates, and Jinnah and his friends of the League, agreed to accept the illusion. Gandhi soon saw through the fraud, and decided to reject the offer. Motilal remarked: "I now see that the Round Table is hollow at the centre."

The year was at an end. The Viceregal declaration had proved a snare and a fraud. It was in this atmosphere that Gandhi was asked by the Congress to advise as to who should be elected Congress President for the 1929 winter session at Lahore. Motilal had presided over the Calcutta session the year earlier. Gandhi would have willingly supported the re-nomination of Motilal, since there was no one in the Congress, who had felt more disillusioned. Motilal was still the most constructive and practical-minded statesman in the Congress: popular with the Hindus and the Muslims alike. But he himself confessed that he and his like had played their innings, that the country needed a change in leadership, an aggressive approach to problems, and a new message. A large number of Congress Committees commended the name of Vallabhbhai Patel, the "Sardar" whose generalship had made Bardoli possible. He had shown consummate capacity for organi-

³ India was represented at the Geneva Labour Conference and in the League of Nations by Government nominees.

zation, for enforcing discipline, at the same time combining courage with non-violence. His election to the presidential chair would have been a fitting recognition of his services and his capacity for leadership. But Gandhi was in no mood to reward services. He wanted to select someone who could meet a variety of requirements which the situation demanded. Gandhi looked round, and finally decided to offer the "crown of thorns" to Jawaharlal Nehru. There were many who criticised Gandhi for his choice. Pandit Malaviya did not like my approving Nehru's election in my paper. "He is too young, and immature," he said. "Besides he is headstrong and indiscreet. He is sure to misguide the Congress. Except for being Motilal's son, what has he done, after all, to deserve this honour? Gandhi himself was the fittest person for the job." About himself Gandhi had said: "I am not keeping pace with the march of events. There is, therefore, a hiatus between the rising generation and me." To silence the tongue of criticism and to assure the country of the wisdom of his choice, Gandhi wrote about Jawaharlal: "By his bravery, determination, integrity and grit, he has captivated the imagination of the youth of the land." He continued: "He is rash and impetuous, say some. This quality is an additional qualification at the present moment. And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman. He is pure as crystal, he is truthful beyond suspicion. He is a knight *sans peur, sans reproche*. The nation is safe in his hands."⁴

⁴ After his election, Jawaharlal wrote to Gandhi, "I am very nervous about the matter. I have not the politician's flair for forming groups and parties. My one attempt in this direction—the formation of the Independence for India League last year—was a hopeless failure.... Most people who put me forward for the Presidentship do so because they want to keep someone else out.... If I have the misfortune to be President, you will see that the very people who put me there... will be prepared to cast me to the wolves."—Nanda, *The Nehrus*, p. 313.

8

The Head of a Needle

Lajpatnagar, a sprawling town of hundreds of tents, was set up on the banks of the Ravi, on the outskirts of Lahore, for the Congress session of 1929. As at Amritsar, ten years earlier, once again history was to be made in the Punjab. The young man who had joined us in draining out rain water from the *pandal* at Amritsar, was to preside over the Lahore session.¹ He was thirty-nine. We, who were then mere volunteers, were now rubbing shoulders with top leaders, and even helping in shaping policies. Gandhi, who was then only emerging as a rising star, was now in supreme control of the Congress. He had a firm hold on the masses, and stood out as a spiritual giant among his compeers. Motilal Nehru, the man with a princely practice and moderate views, had virtually become a political fakir. After having tried all reasonable methods to win freedom by persuasion and protest, he was now as prepared for bold action as his impetuous son.

The Presidential procession was unique in Congress history. Presidents had been taken out on carriages drawn by eight to twenty-four horses. Presidents had ridden caparisoned elephants. Presidents had driven in limousines. But it was left to the youthful Jawaharlal to ride a horse. At the head of the procession were contingents of uniformed volunteers, marching on foot with their own bands. The most conspicuous among

¹ To help us drain the water from the Congress Pandal at Amritsar, Jawaharlal with the help of a cousin had pulled in a hand-operated fire extinguisher from a neighbouring fire station.

the volunteers were the Red Shirts, under their leader, a six-foot Pathan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, with their own band of bagpipers. They reminded me of my own khaki-clad corps from the North which attended the session at Amritsar ten years earlier. We came with memories of martial law. They had brought with them more recent memories of having been cast into stinking dungeons, handcuffed and manacled, of having faced bullets, batons and lathis, and of having been kept starving, or given foul food and flogged for not eating it.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, whom I had named the Frontier Gandhi, the founder of the Red Shirt movement, came from a rich Pathan family. He had now become a convert to Gandhi's principle of non-violence. His leadership had created a new awakening among the Frontier Pathans. Though known to be ferocious fighters, they had, since British occupation, known nothing but a civilian form of military rule.

Women volunteers in ten years had grown into a trained contingent. They gave a touch of the colourful to the procession. Non-cooperation had drawn thousands of women from the seclusion of their homes, to become valuable participants in the national struggle. They had organized demonstrations for boycotting of foreign cloth, and were practically in charge of picketing. Some among these women had also seen the inside of prisons, had faced lathi charges and persecution.

On a gray charger, dressed in simple khadi, wearing a Gandhi cap, sitting firmly in the saddle like a seasoned rider, the picture of youth and vivacity, rode the Congress President. He was followed by two hundred volunteers on horse-back, a cavalcade on bicycles, and a large contingent of leaders in cars and carriages. More than three hundred thousand people lined the route of the procession. Sitting on the balcony of a house along the route, Motilal and Swarup Rani watched as the swelling mass shouted: "Jawaharlal Nehru ki Jai", "Motilal Nehru ki Jai", "Inquilab Zindabad", "Bhagat Singh Zindabad", "Gandhi ki Jai". It was a great moment in the life of Jawaharlal. He was thrilled by the applause, by the faith and confidence of the people. He realized at the same time that, from then

onwards, he had to live up to this applause, this confidence, this faith, come what may. The sense of being the youngest President was flattering to his ego. But what he was not yet conscious of was that, while he was that day riding the party, for many years to come the party was going to ride him, till he could hardly distinguish whether he was the pack horse of the party or its favourite leader! He had become that day not master but bondman of the party: like Gandhi, a grand instrument of destiny, and slave to a cause!

The Congress session was held in a spacious hessian-panelled, khadi-roofed *pandal*, with floor space for more than thirty thousand. Every inch was taken. Several thousands squeezed around the *pandal* outside. Unlike Amritsar, there were no chairs, on the floor or on the dais. Here and there, one came across someone in European clothes. But, the dhoti or the churidars and the Gandhi cap had become the rule.² As I looked around, I noticed that most of the veterans of 1919 had gone. Many who had become veterans were men who had emerged out of the non-cooperation movement, and in many cases undergone the baptism of jail life, or had otherwise taken an active and conspicuous part in the struggle.

The 1929 Congress was also notable for the emergence of a band of professional "leaders" with, in many cases, a renunciatory record of sacrifice unknown in the history of any other revolution. But they were very jealous of their status and position, and very sensitive to tokens of public applause. They preferred garlands to food. They also represented a change in public values. The heart had become more important than the head. Anyone who could caste a halo of spiritualism or austerity about himself was superior to both. Nine yards of homespun, a Gandhi cap and a jail ticket were more basic to leadership than academic ability or intellectual merit. Carding and spinning were added qualifications. A portable *charkha* was the best passport to popularity. Since leaders had to have

²Partly because of my status in the Congress, and partly because of my position as a publicist, I now sat with the VIPs on the dias, and many a times close to the President.

followers, they brought large contingents by special trains, almost like religious heads taking bands of their disciples to a pilgrimage. The followers not only offered homage to their leaders themselves on appropriate occasions, but helped to secure homage and applause from others. Garlanding was one form of offering homage. Bowing and the touching of feet another. Every leader had his own trade mark. If one aspired to become a leader, one had to invent one, almost like the aristocracy of Europe searching for its own special title and a Court of Arms. No two leaders grew beards in the same style, cut their hair in the same manner, wore dhoties or churidars in the same fashion. Every one had more than one identification mark, and a distinctive appellation. Gandhi, even though he disliked it, went by the title of Mahatma. By the same token the Nehrus were known as Pandits. Then there was a rich assortment of Acharyas, Maulvis, Maulanas, Syeds, Gyanis, Babus, Deshbandhus, Netajis and so forth.

Gandhi stood out now as the spiritual leader and the soul of the Congress. Motilal Nehru, a fading relic of the old guard, seemed the wise and cautious chief. Jawaharlal Nehru was the man of action. Some called them the supreme trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. As for the rest, they were a band of tried and seasoned patriots; some highly capable, some moderately ignorant. But they were mostly the creation of Gandhi. Although ostensibly the Congress had a democratic constitution, and expressed a righteous faith in elections, except for its lower echelons, elections played a minor part in determining the composition of its different bodies, and very little indeed so far as major office-bearers and the Working Committee (High Command) were concerned. By a process of musical chairs, the top leaders divided between themselves the offices and positions of control.

Ten years had witnessed another change in values. During the years before 1920, Congress leaders had independent means of livelihood. This was not possible now. Most of the wholetime workers, who if left free to follow their professions would have earned enough to support themselves in luxury,

had now to depend on meagre allowances paid out of Congress funds or by private donors. Gandhi was a hard task-master. He wanted workers to lead a life of austerity. Their allowances were fixed on that basis. Most of the leaders found these allowances inadequate. They had to keep up with the "Joneses". They had to live in Bungalows. They needed cars to move about. Even though Gandhi travelled third class, they preferred the comforts of the first or the second class. They had also to feed their followers. Some of them were reported to spend a hundred rupees a day on tours. In search of party funds, some tried to replenish private resources as well. Except for a conspicuous few, leadership and an affluent standard of living went together, whatever the means for maintaining it. Critical eyebrows were raised many times, when reports appeared that Khilafat funds and Congress funds were in a dubious state of adjustment. Some public donations found their way regularly into private channels. Such surnames as "Maulana Chanda" became commonplace. Occasionally some black sheep were censured for mixing up public and private accounts. But on the whole this failing, if the lapses were not serious, was treated with understanding and indulgence, even by Gandhi.

In the Working Committee Sardar Patel was still nearer Gandhi than Nehru. A man of action rather than of speeches, he was a rigid disciplinarian. He was more concerned with controlling the party machine than with public applause. Another of Gandhi's intimate lieutenants was Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a man with polite manners, a subtle mind, caustic humour and undefined loyalties. Babu Rajendra Prasad from Bihar was unassuming, sincere and every inch a gentleman. He was a devoted follower and a self-effacing worker. He had been a student of great distinction and a lawyer of great promise. Mrs Sarojini Naidu occupied a position of unique importance. She had the confidence of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. She was a wonderful poet and a great orator. She had a lively sense of humour. She was perhaps the only one who could call Gandhi "Mickey Mouse", Mohammed Ali, the

"Sheikh of Araby" and Subhas Bose a "Glaxo baby". She could even pull Jinnah's leg without being snubbed. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a spectacular personality, a great scholar in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and a master of Muslim theology. As a speaker he was fluent, and as a man polite and gracious. Acharya Kripalani, a former professor, was among the younger men around Gandhi. He tried hard to reconcile his devotion to Jawaharlal with his loyalty to Sardar Patel. He could never make up his mind as to the star to whom he wanted to hitch his political wagon. The problem child out of the younger group was Subhas Chandra Bose. In the early twenties he had resigned from the Civil Service and joined the non-cooperation movement. At the special session of the Congress in Calcutta he had appeared on horse-back, wearing the nearest imitation to a military uniform as Chief of the volunteer corps. He grew up as a loyal lieutenant of C. R. Das, although he preferred a more aggressive programme. He shared Nehru's wider approach to international affairs, but was more inclined towards Fascism than to Nehru's Fabianism. He was bold, courageous and fearless. He believed that graduated violence and mass non-violence were not contradictory, and the two creeds could co-exist. Gandhi liked him but had his doubts. Vallabhbhai Patel disliked him thoroughly.

Nehru's speech as President was a masterly performance. The printed script was conventional, and had probably been seen by Gandhi and Motilal. But he surprised everybody by breaking off from the printed script, and making some sensational pronouncements extempore. He called upon Britain to make terms for a peaceful, orderly withdrawal or be prepared to be thrown out. "India is to be for Indians. India is to be a free, independent, sovereign socialist State." He gave notice to England that any debts or commitments made without India's consent would be repudiated. This sentence alone was sufficient to send a cold shiver down the spine of many British magnates who were feeding on monopolies and concessions. Finally, he said: "None of us can say what we can achieve and when we can achieve it. But success often comes to those who

dare and act; it seldom goes to the timid, who are ever afraid of the consequences. We play for high stakes, and if we seek to achieve great things, it can only be through great dangers."

Two days of discussion followed in the Subjects Committee and in the open session. Sardar Patel and others felt that talk of socialism was premature, and that no purpose would be served by frightening away the capitalists and the princes, some of whom at least had lent financial support to the Congress and to Congress leaders. Subhas Bose and several others who had ganged up with Nehru suggested the setting up of a parallel government, so that if a stage came for non-payment of taxes, as in Bardoli, the parallel government would be in a position to collect them. At the stroke of twelve midnight the Congress passed the resolution declaring that henceforward it would fight for independence and accept nothing less. Gandhi was given the sole authority to decide the future programme.

That night a strong, biting cold breeze was blowing across the Ravi river. Even so, thousands of men and women collected around the flag pole in the centre of Lajpatnagar. Jawaharlal unfurled the newly adopted tricolour with the charkha as the flag of independence. The Frontier pipers played "Hindustan Hamara". The sky was rent with lusty cries of "Inquilab Zindabad" and "Gandhi aur Nehru ki Jai". All sang in chorus "Jhunda Uncha Rahe Hamara".³ Groups of men and women formed into circles and went round and round the flag pole in an ecstasy I have never witnessed again, Jawaharlal leading the inner circle. Jawaharlal had lit a new fire in the hearts of youth. He had set before them new horizons. But in effect it was Gandhi who had been voted once again as the future dictator, the general who had to plan the strategy of the new movement, who had to lay down rules of conduct, and select his weapons and his soldiers for the great battle. I asked Jawahar later as to what Gandhi had planned. "I don't know." Subhas was more articulate. "Perhaps he wants us again to spin our way to freedom." I asked Gandhiji himself. He smiled.... "I have not given any thought to it yet. The

³ May the national flag fly high.

resolution has only just been adopted. I must first exhaust all avenues of cooperation." He did.

Despite the challenge and despite the resolution, he sent a letter to Lord Irwin (five days after "Independence Day" had been celebrated all over India), through a British Quaker, Reginald Reynolds, putting forward eleven demands whose acceptance might still persuade the Congress to agree to Dominion Status, and to attend the Round Table Conference. Jawaharlal was confounded! As President he had not even been consulted.⁴ I asked Motilal for his comments, after Reginald Reynolds delivered the letter. He flew into a temper. "Only Gandhi can understand Gandhi," he said. But Jawaharlal was more volatile! "On the 26th the nation took the pledge to accept nothing but independence. A week later our greater leader puts forward his eleven points! We look like fools in the eyes of the people." Jawaharlal, in the meantime, was preparing for a likely arrest. He had given up smoking. Even the eating of meat. He had started a self-imposed regimen of austerity. When I asked Gandhiji some time later why he had put forward his eleven points, he said, "When Lord Krishna was negotiating with Duryodhana, as an emissary of the Pandavas, he made many offers. But, finally, he asked the Kauravas to surrender to the Pandavas a territory equal to the head of a needle. It was only when even this was refused that Lord Krishna declared that the last chance for peace had failed." India did not enter anything like the Battle of Kurukshetra. But Gandhi soon after started the movement of civil disobedience, which brought India almost to the portals of freedom.

⁴ The points: total prohibition, fixing the exchange ratio at 1s 4d, abolition of the salt tax, reduction of military expenditure, reduction of salaries of Civil Servants, a protective tariff against foreign cloth, etc.

9

Salt and Brimstone

Gandhi decided to declare war! His army consisted of seventy-odd dhoti-clad individuals, all members of the Sabarmati Ashram, fully trained in the art of non-violent warfare. Their weapons: *taklis*¹ and *charkhas*². Their destination: Dandi, a seaside village. The starting point of the expedition: Ahmedabad, 24 miles from Dandi. Their objective: to pick up contraband salt from the seaside, thus defying the British Empire to do its worst, or to capitulate.

There was something comic and quixotic about this tattered, khadi-clad army, and its half-naked general with a bamboo staff in his hand, presumptuously challenging the might of the most powerful military-supported Empire in the world. British officials and many people abroad chuckled at the thought of it. Millions who had earlier rallied to Gandhi's battle cry were perplexed. When Motilal first learnt that Gandhi had chosen defiance of the "salt laws" to wage the battle of independence, he exclaimed with dismay: "It is all so damned crazy!" Any feeling of amusement or shock disappeared when, on the morning of March 12, at 6.30 a.m., after his usual prayers, Gandhi, his bamboo staff in hand, stepped out of the Ashram at the head of his band of 73 disciples and announced with spartan determination: "Either I shall return with what I want, or my dead body will float on the ocean." "The voice within me," he said, "is clear. I must put forth all my effort,

¹ A spinning top.

² Spinning wheel.

or retire altogether and for all time from public life. I feel now is the time, or it will be never. And so I am out for battle."

Gandhi was then sixty-one, emaciated by many fasts and the torture of many imprisonments. And yet, at the head of his little army, through marshy roads and boggy paths, indifferent to the heat of the sun, he walked, briskly, ten miles every day, almost like a man inspired. On the route, he unfolded his plan of action to the nation. A general disobedience of the salt act, he declared, should start all over the country after he and his followers had reached Dandi and had picked up contraband salt, or after his arrest, whichever was earlier. He expected a minimum of ten men from each of the 70,000 Indian villages to come forward to break the salt laws. This alone, he said, would paralyse the Government. With throbbing hearts and wistful impatience hundreds of thousands who felt willing to respond to the call of the general, waited for the signal and watched keenly the march of the spartan pilgrims to the sea. Government officials, who had laughed and chuckled over the ultimatum, now felt baffled and non-plussed.

Gandhi and the pilgrims marched on. With every step their message of courage, determination and sacrifice reverberated the words, "Their's not to reason why, their's is but to do and die," through millions of hearts, creating an atmosphere of tense excitement throughout the country. As the marchers neared the last lap of their pilgrimage, the Government mobilized all its forces to go into action at the given signal. The police force was reinforced. Even contingents of women police were recruited hurriedly to deal with women satyagrahis. Army units were spread all over the country and stationed at strategic points. Thousands of criminals whose terms remained unexpired were released to make room for Gandhi's followers.

On the 5th of April Gandhi reached Dandi. On April 6, after a bath in the sea, and his morning prayer, Gandhi proceeded to the seashore, with the solemn grimness of a man about to explode an atom bomb. At 8-30 a.m., the zero hour,

at the head of his little army, with thousands watching the scene, he stood in prayer, bent low and picked up a handful of sea salt. From the gathered thousands rose the cries of "Inquilab Zindabad", "Gandhi ki Jai" which reverberated across the waves. No police were present. The atom bomb of non-violence had been exploded. The battle had begun, in the words of T. S. Elliot, "Not with a bang but a whimper"!

Gandhi proved to be a master-mind in timing his zero hour. Since the days of martial law the country had been observing the week from April 6, the starting of the Rowlatt Act agitation, up to April 13, the day of the Jallianwala massacre, as "National Week". This was the most opportune time for calling forth sacrifices from the people. From the North to the South, from the East to the West, in most villages and in almost all towns, bands of people started preparing contraband salt, or auctioning it in the streets. On the seashores salt was plentiful. Villagers in their hundreds of thousands went out freely to collect bagfuls of salt, not merely as an act of civil disobedience, but because it was for once free, and they needed it. When police parties swooped down on them, beat them up or snatched away their bags, they felt bewildered and cheated. This added to their spirit of rebellion.

In inland areas, however, there was something comic about the manufacture of salt. In Delhi we sent out search parties to discover saline soil near the city. Loni (the salt village) had a lot of salt in its soil, but it was far away. Finally, we decided on a spot across the Jamuna which revealed a few white saline deposits. Thousands collected at the spot to witness the ceremony. Huge cauldrons were placed on improvised ovens, filled with water drained out of a lot of good earth. There finally emerged at the bottom of these cauldrons a deposit, which we publicly declared as "salt". Volunteers wrapped it up in pieces of paper. In a short while thousands of these packets were sold, fetching a large sum for the movement. It seemed as if Gandhi had started, all over the country, salt factories to produce the most expensive and most spurious saline product in the world! Along with others, and to convince the

watchful police force, I tasted the packet handed over to me with a smack of relish. But it took some time to get over the foul taste of sand, salt and putrid soil. It was the same in other in land places all over the country. In certain towns and villages salt was purchased from the market the night before and mixed in the soil, so that the farce of "manufacturing" the contraband commodity could be completed.

In the beginning the police watched with amusement these amateurish efforts to defy the salt law. As the tempo of police brutality increased, more people joined in, more salt pans became the centre of contraband activity. At all hours of the day, the police were on the move on their skull-cracking expeditions, till their smiting hands felt exhausted, and more reinforcements had to be summoned, to preserve the majesty of the law and the prestige of British authority. Dharasana, near Bombay, a seashore village where Government contractors collected sea water in pans to prepare salt, soon became the focal point of "Salt Satyagraha". Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the Poet Nightingale of India,³ headed the assault. Thousands of volunteers made a determined effort to capture the Dharasana Salt Works. Every time the volunteers advanced towards the salt pans, foot and mounted police savagely beat them down with steel-shod lathis. Many were crushed under horses' hoofs.⁴

³ Gandhi had nominated her as third in order of command. The second, Justice Abbas Tyabji, a bearded veteran of eighty, was the first to be arrested.

⁴ Some idea of the violence and brutality of the assailants and the dare-devil, disciplined non-violence of the victims can be gained from how an American agency representative, Miller, whom I knew very well, and who was one of the early American pressmen to come to India, described "the battle of Dharasana":

"A hundred yards from the stockade the Satyagrahis drew up and a picked column advanced. Suddenly at a word of command scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers, and rained blows on their heads with steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ninepins. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors without breaking the ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down. Bodies toppled over in threes and fours, bleeding from great gashes on their scalps. Group

While Dharasana and Wadala, another seaside Government Salt depot on the West Coast, were the focal points of the "Salt Satyagraha", the savage brutalities of the police became commonplace all over the country. In the North-Western Frontier, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brave band of Red Shirts organized mammoth demonstrations in Peshawar, Mardan, Charsada and other towns. In Delhi women came out in their hundreds to organize the boycott of liquor and manufacture contraband salt. Vithalbhai Patel could witness no longer with equanimity the sight of thousands inviting suffering while he enjoyed the security of the "Speaker's Chair". He resigned on April 25. Malaviya, Aney and others, who represented the last remnants of Congress opposition, also withdrew from the Assembly, thus completing the isolation of the British from the people.

The second phase of the rising tide of nonviolent rebellion was reached when Government decided to lop off the tall poppies. On May 3 Gandhi was arrested. In anticipation of Gandhi's arrest, a muzzling ordinance was passed in mid-April whereby any newspaper could be called upon to pay heavy securities, to suspend publication or even to forfeit its press and property, if directly or indirectly, by sign, inference or innuendo, it caused offence to the administration. This enabled me and many editors and journalists to participate more freely in the struggle. As a protest against this order most of the nationalist papers, including my own, *The Hindustan Times*, closed down.⁵ We felt that under the muzzling ordinance, no honest expression of views or presentation of news was possible. As a counter-blast to this move, all over the country, unauthorized news bulletins made their appearance. In Delhi,

after group walked forward, sat down, and submitted to being beaten into insensibility, without raising an arm to fend off the blows. Finally, the police became enraged by the non-resistance. They commenced savagely kicking the seated men in the abdomen and testicles. The injured men writhed and squealed in agony, which seemed to inflame the ire of the police."

⁵ The paper had already been called upon to deposit heavy securities because of its progressive policy and my forthright views.

we published bulletins in Hindi, in Urdu and in English. It was the most exciting phase in my journalistic career. The bulletins were drafted in secret, and, to dodge the police, cyclostyled in moving trucks, in the backyards of factories and in wayside villages. Despite the best efforts of the police the offending editors and publishers could not be traced. We wrote without restraint, with a lot of emotion.

On the day of Gandhi's arrest I found myself in the front line of a mammoth procession the like of which I have never witnessed again. At one time Chandni Chowk was covered from end to end, length and width-wise with human beings packed like sardines. The entire administration stood paralysed. The police did not even make an appearance. It seemed as if I and a few of my associates were in supreme control of the city. Every shop, office and business house had closed down. All transport was suspended. The courts alone were open. The moving human mass under some secret guidance decided to proceed to the law courts. We had no choice. The leaders were being led! As the human glacier poured into the court compound, we were confronted with the first sign of authority: a contingent of British soldiers behind an array of mounted machine guns. It seemed as if Jallianwala Bagh was going to be repeated! The Commandant approached us, ordered us to stop, and then announced that if the crowd did not disperse within fifteen minutes, his men would open fire. By a peculiar presence of mind, I went up to him, and told him that if he really had orders to shoot, we had no choice. It was in no man's power to disperse in fifteen minutes a mammoth collection of half a million people—men, women and children. But if the law courts were formally closed down, the crowd would disperse peacefully at once. Evidently, he had no desire to shoot and also wanted a means of escape. A few doors of the courts were formally closed by his men and we appealed to the people to disperse. I then realized how easy it is to collect a human mass and how difficult it is to disperse it. The procession broke up, but in their thousands people took different return routes. This enabled the police and the military to

emerge from their hide-outs. A section of the dispersing crowd was mercilessly beaten up by the police. Among these were many ladies including my wife and sister. Many fell into a dried well. Near the post office, the railway station and the courts, crowds were waylaid, shot at, beaten down with lathis or just chased off by mounted police. Several were killed, many wounded and a few hundred taken prisoners.

This was not an isolated scene or an isolated incident. All over the country, on that day, business came to a standstill. In the Frontier Province, a reign of dark terror was let loose by the police, the army and the air force, more brutal and more diabolical than anywhere else in India. Troops, aeroplanes, tanks, machine guns were called into commission, and employed freely to crush the spirit of the Red Shirts. A few hundred were killed and many more hundreds left maimed and wounded. Five hundred tons of bombs were dropped from the air. For the first time, however, Indian soldiers refused to fire on a non-violent Indian crowd. Two platoons of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles were called upon to open fire at a large crowd collected in the main marketplace. They refused, broke rank and handed over their arms to their officers. They were placed under arrest, and court-martialled.

Despite this reign of dark terror, people were not cowed down. They offered themselves peacefully for arrest in their thousands. The picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops intensified. Almost all the foreign cloth shops closed down. In Delhi we became trustees of the keys of all these shops, stores and godowns. We became practically the heads of a sort of traders' government. In June after a few months of hectic activity, I was arrested and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment, for "disobedience of the Salt Act". These trials were mostly a farce. The police could not produce any "salt" as evidence and yet the accused pleaded guilty to the charge.

Even though as "A" Class prisoners we enjoyed certain amenities and immunities not available to hundreds and thousands of our other comrades, our life was worse than that

of common felons and homicides in prisons like Sing Sing. I was lodged in a small cell with grills on both sides. From these the hot air and the June sun could pierce freely. Brick platforms served as beds. One could supplement food, but our mainstay was prison food which apart from being coarse suffered from a process of adulteration no one could check. For the first time I realized that meat could be just bones, the yolk of eggs had red pigments, and water could take the colour of milk. For all this we had to pay. Even the vegetables seemed to be like pickings from a garbage trough. The conditions under which thousands of other common prisoners, men and women, lived were a veritable hell. Large numbers were penned in stockades or open barracks. They slept on bare floors with rush mattresses under them, and, in winter, lice-infested blankets as cover. An iron bowl served as wash basin and eating plate. Morning ablutions were performed in queues to the ticking of a stop watch, in stinking lavatories. In exposed community bathrooms we got sizzling hot water in summer, ice-cold in winter. Prisoners were often manacled in twos while entering the lavatory or the bathroom. Those undergoing rigorous imprisonment were made to grind wheat, pound rice, crush oil, or hammer pulp for paper, till their hands got blistered and their backs ached. Any refusal to do the allotted task invited kicks, whiplashes and flogging. After a hard day prisoners were offered food of boiled lentils and coarse bread, the ingredients including a lavish mixture of gravel and sand. Only intense, gnawing hunger could make it palatable, and only the physically strong could digest it. Many left the prisons with damaged livers, chronic piles, duodenal ulcers, renal colic, stones in the gall bladder or tuberculosis.⁶ Added to these physical tortures were insults, affronts and a calculated swinish behaviour on the part of jail officials, which we suffered in common with the rest. We tolerated it as part of our pledge of non-violence. The isolation behind high gray prison walls and iron grills was itself trying and sometimes insufferable. All this told on one's mind and nerves, and

⁶ I still nurse my piles.

created a sort of suppressed neurasthenia. It made us quarrelsome and touchy. No historian has, or can, record the sufferings, the sacrifices and the tortures which hundreds of thousands of unknown men and women silently and repeatedly underwent, in the cause of freedom, or the calculated brutality and inhuman callousness of those who tried to crush their patriotism under a steamroller of savage, ruthless repression.

Days passed! The resolve, the mute suffering, the courage of the people began to tell on the minds of the police and the jail officials. The Garhwali battalion was not the only one to be affected. The police lathi began to lose its force and impact. There were more skulls missed than aimed at, more casualties were reported than actually occurred. The jailors turned a blind eye on little lapses. Prisoners were allowed a little more freedom. All this did not go unnoticed by the British officials, who felt that they could strain the loyalty of their employees up to a limit and no more. That limit had been reached by the end of 1930. I was released at the end of December. Only a prisoner knows what it is to be free again!

Lord Irwin's term of office was coming to an end. By the end of January, the first Round Table Conference had run the course of a full farce. With Gandhi and the Congress absent, it was like staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. Irwin now made a conciliatory gesture. On January 23rd, three days before Independence Day, Gandhi and all members of the Working Committee were unconditionally released. Jawaharlal who was serving a second term, having been re-arrested in November after a nine days' respite, hastened to the side of his ailing father. In this hour of triumph he lay worn out, incapacitated and struggling for every breath. It was his happiest and saddest hour! Gandhi and other leaders also raced to his bedside for a last meeting. "Do not forget the Garhwalis" were his last words to Gandhi. On the 6th of January Motilal died.

At the suggestion of friends who had sounded Lord Irwin beforehand, Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy seeking an interview "to discuss the political situation". Irwin invited Gandhi to meet him.

10

Lull Before the Storm

Something very uncanny and striking happened when Gandhi went to the Viceroy's House to meet Lord Irwin on the first day of the negotiations. He was received by the A.D.C. on arrival. He was being escorted when, with his usual briskness, he outstepped the escort and, practically unguided, stood outside the chamber where the Viceroy was waiting.¹ I asked him whether it was intuition that led him to the door, or accident. He smiled. "Many people will not believe what I am going to say," he said. "A few days before my unexpected release I had a dream, I had been invited by Lord Irwin to meet him. I went to the Viceroy's House and was led by the A.D.C. to the chamber in which I actually met him. Even the chair on which he asked me to sit seemed familiar. At noon time I asked to be permitted to take my midday meal. The Viceroy wanted to arrange a special table for me. But I asked if I could sit on a garden seat in the open and eat my simple

¹ During the period Gandhi was negotiating with Irwin, I came very much closer to the Mahatma. The meetings between the two were few and far between long recesses. It took some days before members of the Working Committee could assemble and King Arthur could have all his Knights around him. To prevent "unauthorised" leakages, Gandhi took from me a promise not to publish any reports about the parleys without consulting him. This was in pursuance of an undertaking he had given to Lord Irwin. In return he assured me that I would know as much about the negotiations as any member of the Working Committee. I kept my promise. He, on his part, during morning or afternoon walks or sometimes while spinning or carding, would tell me with utmost frankness most of the latest developments. His utter confidence in me was most embarrassing. I had to seem ignorant even to my own reporters, when reading or rejecting their copy.

fare. The Viceroy agreed. I saw the seat where in my dream I had lunched and even mentally identified the tree under which I sat. It all seemed so real." I was moved. I asked if I could be permitted to tell the story. "But this is only part of the dream," he said. "It may all prove to be a grand illusion after all. I dreamt that I was on the high seas destined for London. In London I met the Prime Minister, the King and many others and pleaded with them on behalf of India." "But that would follow if the negotiations succeed," I impatiently suggested, awed by the casualness with which Gandhiji was recalling his dream. "This is not the end of the dream," Gandhi said. "I took leave of the King and the Prime Minister who were cordial and kind. And then I woke up with a start, seeing myself being taken to Yervada jail and being politely asked by the Jail Superintendent to lie down in the bed in which I was sleeping." I do not know how many dreams or similar premonitions Gandhi had during his life of intense struggle and prolonged suffering. But it certainly explained to me what he repeatedly meant by the "inner voice" and "God's will", which he often invoked during periods of crisis, or to justify decisions which initially shocked his followers, but later turned out to be the talismans for unimaginable achievements. I published this story after the last chapter in this memorable dream had been written by the hand of destiny. It all turned out to be so true! The negotiations ended in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. When Gandhi signed the pact, Jawaharlal sarcastically remarked, "It gave the country a handful of nothing." Gandhi, however, sincerely believed that all the conditions Irwin had promised would be implemented and that Britain, after the last big battle of civil disobedience, would agree to transfer the substance of power to the hands of Indians, even though it may be some time before full and complete independence could be achieved. Privately to us he repeatedly said, "I would be even satisfied if we got enough power to shape the destiny of every village. That would be Swaraj in substance."

People built up high hopes. Most of those who had been in prison began returning to their normal way of life. Among

the influential classes, who had hitherto kept away from the Congress, or had only secretly helped with funds, Gandhiji's stock went high. During the several weeks he spent in Delhi, they all collected around him, bedecked in improvised *khadi* clothes and Gandhi caps, crowding prayer meetings, hustling in on morning and afternoon walks, and sometimes seeing him off to the Viceroy's House, or waiting hours to receive him after the interview. He was suddenly surrounded by millionaires and mill-owners, from Calcutta, Kanpur, Boinbay and Ahmedabad. They had all benefited by the Swadeshi movement and the boycott of foreign cloth. At a time when the world was passing through a financial crisis, the Indian textile mills had made crores in profits. Seeing the fuss that these plutocrats were making around Gandhi, Dr Ansari, at whose house he was then staying, humorously remarked: "It would almost seem like all the bootleggers had collected to honour 'Pussy-Foot Johnson'." The princes sent secret emissaries with large donations to the Harijan Fund, assuring him of their cordial support. Some even took courage to invite him to visit their States. One ruler offered him his luxurious suite in SS *Rajputana* to enable him to go in comfort if he went to England.

High Government officials, still afraid of establishing contact with an erstwhile rebel, sent their wives and relations to prayer meetings. They even sent with them their visiting cards so that their identity could be noted. These ladies came with their lipstick and hair-do carefully camouflaged under *khadi* saris. They showed more devotion than the scraggy looking jailbirds who pensively sat spinning, sometimes unnoticed, and often being just taken for granted. The Knights and the Nawabs commenced a make-believe round of "Unity Conferences" to secure recognition of their status in public life, and to make these occasions for meeting Gandhi and the Congress leaders on equal terms. The frustrated moderates who had returned from the Round Table Conference empty-handed, Jayakar, Shastri and Sapru, started on the mission of peacemakers between the Government and Gandhi, thereby partly

regaining their lost prestige, and establishing at the same time a claim for more honours from the Government.

When Nehru joined Gandhi in these negotiations, he was surprised at the fact that the demands put forward by Gandhi were so modest and even these were being rejected or bypassed one after the other. He wanted Gandhi to break up negotiations. What staggered him also was the sight of a strange assortment of "honey bees" flapping around Gandhi, jostling and pushing the jail-battered patriots into the shadow, and trying hard to capture the limelight for themselves. Nehru disliked this crowd of adventurers, profiteers, plutocrats and princes. He resented the consideration and deference shown to them. He disliked even more the gargantuan capacity of Gandhi to accept their make-believe homage, their theatrical devotion, with manifest satisfaction, duped probably by the belief that they were under a process of conversion under his magic spell, and that it was not, as was obvious to us, the proverbial gathering of "wolves in sheep's clothing".

Whether Gandhi realized it or not, to them Gandhi had been a great benefactor. While millions went to jail, or faced lathi charges and bullets, they made millions out of their sacrifices. The princes were beholden to Gandhi, because for reasons all his own, albeit of strategy, he prevented the Congress from spreading its organizational network in Indian States. They looked upon him as a million-dollar security force to safeguard their princely privileges and unaccountable extravagances.

Even more repellent than this "ganging up" of the rich around Gandhi, was the sight of the mullas, the maulanas, the Pandits, the Gyanis and other traders in religion, each bringing his own nostrums for creating communal harmony, at the same time preaching, in the name of God and the prophet, doctrines of hate and bigotry and playing on the ignorance, innocence and superstition of the masses. These were the men who glorified the public killing of cows as an imperative act of faith. These were the men who claimed the playing of music

before mosques as a matter of right. While Nehru in some of his violent moods wished to hang some of them by the nearest lamp post, Gandhi gave them a patient hearing, hoping to convert them to see things more rationally and to become "the true and noble messengers of God".

Even among the immediate set of leaders, Nehru found himself a complete misfit. He had taken to spinning and to carding, but he disliked the public parading of this pastime. To some the spinning wheel seemed like a passport to Gandhi. A few even began to look like Gandhi. Sardar Patel and Rajagopalachari had their heads shaven to Gandhian specifications. But for an extra garment over the dhoti, they could pass as near imitations. None of the leaders could approach Gandhian simplicity in food, but they developed personal fads which became the despair of any host expecting to entertain the grand galaxy called the "Working Committee". I do not know whether Dr. Ansari paid out of his fabulous income, for all that was being spent during these few weeks of negotiations, on the food that was prepared for the leaders either staying, or eating, at his house. But he did often express his despair at providing for diverse fads and tastes. The major segments were vegetarian and non-vegetarian. In the former category were those who preferred spice-free cooking, the rice-eaters, the wheat-eaters, the orthodox and the liberals. Rajen Babu was then a fruitarian after breakfast. Babu Purshottamdas Tandon and a couple of others wanted rice and lentils soaked in water, raw vegetables, curd or milk and fruits. Among the non-vegetarians, Nehru preferred European dishes, Maulana Azad and many others liked their food Indian style, Subhas Bose and Sen Gupta *rasogullas*, whenever available, as dessert. Shaukat Ali when present liked mangoes as an aperitif and loads of ice cream as dessert. The beverages consisted of goat's milk, cow's milk, just milk, milk hot or cold, buttermilk with sugar, buttermilk with salt, tea with either lime, sugar or salt, and coffee. To be a leader without a fad seemed like being a member of the House of Lords without a title!

Gandhiji's prayer meetings at this time attracted sometimes

audiences of a thousand to twenty thousand. There was a lot that was solemn and dignified about them. Gandhiji's very presence, his capacity to go into a virtual trance of communion in a crowded audience, was an inspiration. Some of us tried passionately to catch the solemnity of the silent prayer but could not imitate the more practised pretenders who took a split second to go into a trance, and with stop-watch alertness opened their eyes as soon as Gandhiji did.

To Nehru's political perplexities were now added other worries of a domestic nature. So long as Motilal was alive he had never bothered about financial resources. He moved between the prison and his palatial home with a carefree mind. He had hardly yet recovered from the shock of his father's death when the health of Kamala, his wife, began causing him serious concern. Kamala was frail, remarkably sensitive, and gracious. Her natural beauty was enhanced by the tender alertness in her eyes, the sharpness of her classic features, and an air of graciousness, which only those who have to live between life and death can generate. In mind she was firm, resolute and determined. She had shown rare courage and a capacity for endurance and sacrifice during the "Salt Satyagraha". Even though she had cultivated Western tastes, in accord with the Nehru household and as a result of visits abroad, she was still essentially Indian. She was very Indian as a wife. She idolized her husband, and she was next only to Nehru's mother in believing that Jawahar was born for great things and consciously could do no wrong. He was her hero, her knight errant, her prince charming! Even his occasional flights of temper and irritation were passed over as tension-releasing outbursts, excusable in a man who had to live under constant stress. Besides, she always said with a smile, "there are so few with whom he can freely loose his temper." She often visited Delhi with and without her husband, to meet her mother. She spent several hours with us, sometimes waiting for Jawahar, who would be occupied across the road, where the Ansari mansion was located, attending Working Committee meetings or periodic conferences. Her health was her greatest

anxiety. She struggled hard to cure herself, and even when she found she was losing the race, she retained a quiet cheerfulness, to prevent any reports reaching her husband which might cause him concern or anxiety.

One day at her suggestion we arranged an evening picnic at a friend's garden house near the Qutab, to give Nehru a "break". He liked spells of relaxation snatched between hectic activity. We collected a few intimates, made arrangements for light music and an informal meal. The spacious pool was filled with crystal clear water, at her special request. It was a warm, pleasant evening and the moon was full. Till late, however, there was no sign of Nehru. Evening was closing into night. Yet Kamala was sure he would come. "I told him about the pool and the clean water. Jawahar loves a swim, next only to riding, even though it may only be just puddling." She was right. The Congress President had got out of an important meeting as soon as he could. In Congress meetings one lost the sense of time! He had "wasted" only some "avoidable" minutes looking for a bathing costume, then had dashed top speed to the rendezvous. He was like a schoolboy let loose. He liked dabbling in the pool, diving, splashing others with water, cracking jokes, enjoying the light music, praising the splendour of the moon, picking up and eating odd bits of food—all rather recklessly. Kamala beamed with joy. Even looking at both of them in that state of carefree exultation was infectious. To participate in such jovial moods was always a privilege.

Kamala and Jawahar were to leave for Allahabad by the morning train. It was arranged that I should take Kamala to the station, and put her in the second class coupé reserved for the couple. After attending to some important engagements Nehru was to join us at the station. The train however left and there was no sign of the Congress President. Kamala was deeply concerned; also depressed! "It is not like him. He is so punctual. If he for some reason could not reach he would have sent a message." While she made these remarks to console herself, actually she was terribly disappointed and resolutely held back

her tears. She had really looked forward very much to this 12 hours' journey in the seclusion of the coupé together. For the couple such opportunities, she casually mentioned, had been few and far between. She had brought food specially cooked for the journey. She had made the coupé look elegant, comfortably placing a pillow here and a cushion there. She was herself not in the best of health. So I offered to accompany her to Allahabad and return the same night. Suddenly, as the train slowed down at the next stop,² Kamala, who had been pensively peering into space out of the window, brightened up. She saw her husband from a distance waiting on the platform. Jawaharlal jumped on to the footboard of the moving compartment. He was always impatient. That was his way of making up for lost time. Jawahar informed me that he had retained the car which had brought him from Delhi so that it could take me back, with his apologies. Then he added quite casually. "I also ordered breakfast for myself in the station dining room. Don't forget to eat it before you go. I had to pay for it in advance lest they take me as a bad risk." Ever busy, ever in a hurry, but at no time that I can think of forgetful of human obligations, was Jawahar. He did the most tender things with such casualness that in his actions, however generous, there was never any element of vulgarity.

It was in the small hours of a cold December night that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was finally approved, after a whole series of patient but frustrating negotiations. It was signed the next day. Soon after the Pact had been signed, we got reports that, as a first gift, the government had decided to hang Bhagat Singh and his comrades who had been earlier sentenced to Death. As soon as the report was published a wave of indignation spread from one end of the country to the other. Bhagat Singh and his comrades had by now become legendary figures in the eyes of common people. Their courage, their bold utterances in court, their defiant attitude in prison, their abundant capacity to suffer untold tortures, made them the idols of young India. Protesting against foul treatment in

² Ghaziabad.

prison, one of them, Jatin Das, had gone on a fast unto death. For more than seventy days he had struggled and suffered till he died a martyr. Gandhi, who believed the Pact to be a signal triumph, could not even dream that, only a few days after its signing, Irwin would become party to the hanging of these brave patriots, and shock Indian public opinion.

It was Monday morning. All attempts at obtaining a reprieve had failed. The executions were to take place before midnight. Madan Mohan Malaviya with several members of the Legislative Assembly was the first to arrive at Ansari House. He suggested cabling a mercy petition to the King under the signatures of Gandhi, himself and other leaders. In addition he wanted Gandhi to lead a deputation of all top leaders that may be available, to the Viceroy. It was Gandhi's day of silence. On paper slips that the leaders freely exchanged, Gandhi wrote that he had already done his best to secure mercy for the accused, and nothing more could save them. Malaviya and his colleagues failed in their pleadings. Meanwhile Jawaharlal came from his sick bed and sat down. He had been running a temperature. His eyes were bloodshot. He sat wrapped in a Kashmiri Shawl. "Why do you say you can't do anything more," he said to Gandhi. "Why can't we go in a deputation, and plead with the Viceroy. If he is unresponsive, let us sit outside the Viceroy's House and go on a fast. Or do anything, something, as there is still time." He was almost hysterical with suppressed emotion. As Gandhi sat silent, and went on spinning, Jawaharlal said, "Yes, go on spinning and sitting like a Buddha, while the flowers of the land are led to the gallows. Why didn't you ask that they be hanged first, so that the Pact could be signed with their blood!" There was more exchange of notes. Gandhi remained silent—deeply moved but unresponsive. By evening, news came from inside the Central Jail that the prisoners had been taken away to an unknown destination. Gandhi and other leaders were to leave by the night train for Karachi to attend the annual session of the Congress. Sardar Patel was to preside. As Gandhi was leaving Ansari House a message came

that in all probability all was over. It was later revealed that Bhagat Singh and his companions were taken to an isolated forest near Ferozepur, and put to death. It was even alleged that they were savagely hacked by British officers who wanted to avenge the murder of Saunders. All evidence was obliterated. The young men after being put to death were cremated at the same place. As the news came, Gandhi with head bowed over one hand stood for sometime in the open compound, visibly moved and deeply shocked. It appeared later that he had till the last hoped that as a result of his private pleadings with the Viceroy, the executions would be stopped. As I sat with the Mahatma, in the third class carriage in which he was going to Karachi, I asked if he would express his real feelings, even though the worse had happened. On slips of paper Gandhiji began writing and passing on the slips to me, he wrote:

"There never has been within living memory so much romance around any life as has surrounded that of Bhagat Singh. Though I must have seen him as a student in Lahore, many times, I cannot recall Bhagat Singh's features. But during the past month it was a privilege to listen to the story of Bhagat Singh's patriotism, his courage and his deep love for India's humanity. From all the accounts received by me, his daring was unequalled. That he misused his extraordinary courage has been forgotten in the midst of his many activities. The execution of such a youth and his comrades has given them the crown of martyrdom. Thousands feel today personally bereaved in the death. Whilst therefore I cannot associate myself with all the tributes that can be paid to the memory of these young patriots, I warn the youth of the country against copying their example. Let us by all means copy their capacity for sacrifice, their industry, their reckless courage, but let us not use these qualities as they did.... As for the Government, they have put a severe strain upon the settlement, and once more proved their capacity for flouting public opinion. . . We may

accuse the Government of *gundaism*, but let us not accuse them of a breach of the settlement since a commutation of these sentences was no part of the agreement."

Even though Gandhi had asked for a "Universal *Hartal*", thousands of angry youths greeted him on arrival in Karachi with black flags, almost accusing him of having "sold Bhagat Singh's head" as a price to secure the settlement. Gandhi never realized till then that even though India had accepted the creed of non-violence, the people still idolised acts of dare-devil courage. Bhagat Singh and his comrades had become heroes in the eyes of millions.

11

Mickey Mouse in London

Lord Irwin was perhaps essentially honest in conceding in spirit, though not in actual words, most of Mahatma Gandhi's demands. This opened the way to Gandhi attending the "Second" Round Table Conference. After Lord Willingdon had seen to the despatch of Gandhi with a patched up truce, the Conservatives in England and the reactionaries in the Civil Service in India joined in a secret conspiracy to torpedo the Round Table Conference and to prepare for an all-out offensive against the Congress.

Mr Ramsay Macdonald, after inaugurating it, left the Conference in the hands of Lord Sankey, the Lord Chancellor, to mark time. Gandhi sat throughout the proceedings a bewildered witness to a solemn farce, almost like Alice in Wonderland. He saw marionettes dancing to the tune of the India Office. He wondered how he became part of this puppet show. Gandhi soon found himself in the dock. He had come to arraign Britain for crimes against "Man and God". He had come to demand full and complete independence. Instead, in his opening speech, he was at pains to prove that the Congress represented the voice and conscience of the whole of India, and that most of those who sat around the table voicing big claims and making conflicting demands, were the tools and henchmen of the Government. But he found it was all too late! If he did not like the composition of the Conference, he should not have come. He was caught in the web of British diplomacy, in a snare from which there was no escape. He tried to come to

terms with Jinnah, who still seemed willing to work for a free India and to accept joint electorates, if his demand for special representation for Muslims was conceded. But Gandhi suddenly found the Hindu leaders like Malaviya and Moonje obdurate. As "champions of the Sikhs", they refused the one seat which would have met Jinnah's demand. I spoke to Mrs Sarojini Naidu who played a vital part in these negotiations, and who knew Jinnah more intimately than anyone else in the Congress. She felt that Gandhi was inclined to settle with Jinnah but his hands were forced by powerful vested interests.

Gandhi found Ambedkar even more difficult and truculent than Jinnah. Dr Ambedkar had obtained the best education through the generosity of his patron, the enlightened Maharaja Siyaji Rao of Baroda. He had become a political protege of the British. Ambedkar was born an untouchable. But he now lived the life of a refined, fairly westernized man of culture and affluence. I found him brilliant. He was an effective speaker, capable of vitriolic outbursts, biting sarcasm and derisive humour. In private he expressed the utmost regard for Gandhi. But he refused to accept that for that reason Gandhi was a better spokesman of the untouchables than one who was born under the curse of untouchability. "You have to be an untouchable to feel the sting of prejudice, to be permanently dubbed a *pariah*, to be told that even your shadow can pollute the pimps and prostitutes born in a superior caste, that you cannot worship your God in the same temple as others, that even your cattle must be excluded from a common penn because they belong to an untouchable." Gandhi, far from challenging Ambedkar, agreed with many things he said, but insisted that by reserving seats for the depressed classes, as Ambedkar had requested, by putting them on a separate voting register, one may create untouchables into a privileged political class, but this would not help to remove the curse of untouchability. "This," he said, addressing the conference, "would be satanic." Finally, as if he had seen a snake, a hidden cobra raising its poison fangs, he said: "I want to say with

all the emphasis I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I will resist it with my life."

The Round Table Conference dragged on till almost the end of November. Gandhi felt more and more befogged and befooled. Bernard Shaw called on Gandhi at his Knightsbridge residence. "I know something about you, and felt in you a kindered spirit. I claim to be Mahatma 'minor'. You and I represent a very small community on earth," he said, giving Gandhi his hand. Then he said, "Does not the Round Table Conference try your patience?" Gandhi, who was chuckling with laughter at the witty quips of Shaw, sighed deeply and said: "It requires more than the patience of Jove. The whole thing is a huge camouflage and the harangues that we are treated to are meant only to mark time."

Gandhi drew no cheer from the fact that his loin-cloth had not served as a bar against his attending a party to the delegates given by King George at the Buckingham Place. But the event was widely reported and commented upon. Someone referred to Gandhi's scanty attire and he replied with a twinkle in his eyes, "The King had enough for both of us." Gandhi was sent out to visit some of the dairy farms of England. The King had said to him, "Go and see how we take care of our cattle." Replied Gandhi, "I have no doubt, Your Majesty. If only your people took even that much care of my people." At a small farm in Scotland one of the aristocracy was his host. His Grace was wearing informal attire native to Scotland. Out of curiosity he asked Gandhi, "What do you call the dress you are wearing, Mr Gandhi?" "What do you call yours, Your Grace," retorted the Mahatma. "This they call Plus Fours," said the Duke. "Then call mine Minus Fours," retorted Gandhi with a chuckle. All sorts of caricatures of Gandhi appeared in the British press. In the West-end night clubs he became the subject of quips and limericks, his loin cloth lending rich possibilities for questionable humour. "That skinny bloke", "India's Mickey Mouse," he was called. He even found time to meet Charlie Chaplin. "I am told you change into odd clothes to look funny. I don't have to," he told him. All this time,

however, a sense of frustration was growing on him: a premonition that something ghastly was to follow the conclusion of this gilded farce.

He was staying in the East-end with Quaker friends. One day he invited Jinnah for talks. He asked Jinnah what he would have. Just to embarrass Gandhi, Jinnah said, "Scotch and Soda, if you can offer." While Jinnah waited, Gandhi went out himself and brought a syphen of Soda and a bottle of Scotch. "Why don't you pour it for me," quipped Jinnah. Gandhi, whether deliberately or from ignorance poured a little soda from the syphen and was about to empty the bottle of Scotch when Jinnah stopped him. They both laughed. Jinnah then mixed his own drinks. But nothing came out of the interview. On the 1st of December the farce concluded with all the panoplied ceremony, the dignity and solemnity the British alone could lend to a command performance. The minority demands were left by "majority" consent to the arbitration of His Majesty's Government. Mr Ramsay Macdonald reluctantly accepted this "onerous and delicate responsibility." To lend a final touch of irony to the farce, Gandhi was asked to propose a vote of thanks to the Chair!

On the 4th of December Gandhi left for India. En route he was received by Mussolini in Italy. Lowe published a cartoon showing Gandhi squatting in his loin cloth, and around him stood Mussolini in a black shirt, Hitler in a Nazi gray shirt, Mosley in a brown shirt, De Valera in a green shirt and Stalin in a red shirt. The caption ran: "And he won't wear any blooming shirt at all!"

I was waiting for the late edition to go to press when into my office walked in an old press employee, who used to take a conspicuous part in picketting, etc. and often helped in bringing out our secret bulletins. From within the folds of his dhoti, he produced a concealed bundle of ink-smudged papers, left them on my table, and without saying a word departed. I learnt later that he was working in the Government Press. The papers he had left were "proof" copies of more than a dozen Ordinances under print. These gave to the executive all sorts of powers,

and made penal every kind of political activity unpleasant to the authorities. They included heavy punishments for petty offences. The Government could declare any body or association of persons illegal, could arrest anyone belonging to an illegal body, search his house, confiscate all the property of such a body, search its offices, take away its records, and place a ban on all its activities.

I was astounded! I felt a creeping sensation down my spine. It seemed to me so unbelievable, so cold-blooded and so diabolical! I sat at my typewriter and made copies of the documents, during the rest of the night. I then drove to the house of Dr Ansari and placed before him the copies. I was even more astonished when he told me that a couple of days earlier, he had a visit from one of his patients, who was very high up in the C. I. D.¹ He had informed him that lists were being secretly prepared of the names and addresses of all Congress workers, big or small, who had participated in the civil disobedience campaign, and of those who had helped the Congress with money and donations. Reports soon came from different parts of the country that the whole official machinery had been put into reverse gear. The Chief Commissioner of the Frontier held a Durbar, a Moghul-type public audience, to which Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother, Dr Khan Sahib, were invited. They refused because the terms of the pact had not been implemented. This annoyed the authorities. A few days before Gandhi's arrival, when Abdul Ghaffar Khan was preparing to leave for Bombay, he was placed under arrest. Jawaharlal was on his way to Bombay. The train was stopped and he and Sherwani² were placed under arrest. Other arrests followed in quick succession.

When Gandhi landed in Bombay, many of the familiar faces he had looked forward to meet were missing. He saw something else. There were no invitations from his usual rich hosts to stay with them. No Rolls-Royce or Bentley awaited

¹ Indian Secret Service.

² Tassaduq Sherwani, an able non-cooperating lawyer, a member of the Legislative Assembly and a distinguished Muslim leader.

him. He drove to Mani Bhavan, a modest community building. He summoned an informal meeting of the Working Committee and other leaders who were readily available. He wired to Willingdon seeking an interview. While willing to meet Gandhi, Willingdon made it a condition that the measures taken to preserve "law and order" in different provinces were not to be discussed. Gandhi repudiated the charges and refused to have a conditional discussion with the Viceroy. Gandhi wrote: "On the strength of uncontradicted reports, supported by recent activities of the Government of India, to the effect that there may be no other opportunity for me to guide the public, the Working Committee has accepted my advice and passed resolutions tentatively sketching out a plan for civil disobedience." The plan called for resort to conventional methods of civil disobedience, including, where desirable, non-payment of taxes. If the Congress or the AICC were declared unlawful, a whole series of successor presidents and office bearers when named were to step into the breach, appoint their own working committees out of the leaders available, and carry on the struggle in the name of the Congress. Sardar Patel, the then president, named Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Dr Ansari and Pandit Malaviya as respective successors. The Congress was practically caught napping, and had only a few hours to issue instructions. The Government had been preparing for a showdown ever since Gandhi had left India.

Gandhi saw through the mockery of it all. He also saw his dream coming true. He gathered his few possessions as he went to sleep on the night of the 3rd of January after prayers. The next was his day of silence. He was awakened in the dead of night and conveyed back to his old bed in Yervada Jail along with Vallabhbhai Patel. Dark terror broke loose in India.

12

Masked Balls and Black Terror

Lord Willingdon was not new to India. He had served earlier as Governor of Bombay and Madras. He was originally a liberal politician by the name of Freeman. Willingdon had the makings of a shrewd politician, and the flare of Louis XIV. He liked holding *durbars*, himself appearing in gold lace, diamond-studded insignias, bejewelled swords and sashes. Lady Willingdon loved even more to appear in tiaras and diamond necklaces, brocade lilac dresses, suggestive of a Parisian *beau monde*. She introduced the gaiety, the splendour and the animation of the court of Versailles to the hitherto magnificent but austere Viceroy's House. The spacious swimming pool, the hanging gardens, the jasmine scented arbours springing out of Moghul canals, dancing multi-coloured fountains, Persian style ornamental flower beds, secluded summer houses, walled with red trellised Rajputana stone, lent a touch of romance to gaiety. The Willingdons entertained lavishly. They even introduced the "mask" ball, the favourite periods being Charles II and Louis XIV. More than any previous Viceroy and Vicerene, the Willingdons encouraged big, expensive receptions in their honour by princes, talukdars, industrial magnates and rich merchants.¹ Lilac was Lady Willingdon's favourite colour. In stones she wavered between diamonds and pearls. After the Willingdons took their residence, the entire upholstery of

¹ On one occasion in Calcutta their programme was very full. But to "oblige" the Maharaja of Darbhanga they agreed to a pre-lunch cocktail party. The bill was a modest sum of thirty thousand rupees.

Viceroy's House was given a lilac touch. She even introduced the "Lilac Time", a sort of one hour's saving which in England was then called "Summer Time". A little secluded patch on the ridge was named "Lover's Lane". The unlit ridge itself was intended to open up clandestine opportunities for romantic association. The lavish adventures of the Willingdons in Parisian revelry brought its own spate of coffee-house gossip. But anyone who followed the policy of Lord Willingdon could see that behind this facade of expensive pleasure was a well-planned scheme of public relations.

The Willingdons were the first to break down the isolation of the British. By this means they gathered around them all kinds of Indians belonging to the influential classes: princes and their Ministers, high Indian officials, rich landlords and businessmen, loyalists, communalists, liberals and a whole galaxy of titled or title-seeking hangers on with a rich heritage. This was their way to bring the officials and non-officials, the Europeans and the Indians close together.

Whatever remained of the Assembly after withdrawal of the Congress and the Malavyaites, was a galaxy of Knights, Khan Bahadurs, Rai Bahadurs, Dewan Bahadurs or those who aspired to some similar distinction. On many crucial issues so many wanted to vote in favour of the Government that official whips had a hard time persuading ultra-loyal supporters to vote with the opposition, to keep up a semblance of democracy. A stage was once reached when the group consisting of loyalists and nominated members became the largest in the Assembly and asked to be named the official "Opposition". They had as leader a representative of the depressed classes. The position became so awkward that the party had to be split up so as to have less members than the next non-official group.

It was not only with big titles that Willingdon was generous. He showered small titles almost like confetti. There was some title for every one who had effectively helped the Government during the civil disobedience campaign: journalists, politicians, jailors, policemen, executive officers up to the lowest rank, even village headmen and village guards. They had other ways of

establishing binding ties through engineered munificence. British commercial houses were advised to offer well-paid sinecures to selected politicians as legal advisers or just "advisers" if they did not have a law degree to their credit. Fat fees were offered for small cases. Anyone not toeing the official line was taken off the pay-roll. Jobs were reserved for Muslims and other favoured minorities, especially for the sons and proteges of loyal elements. A secret circular issued by the President of the European Chamber of Commerce to all European business houses, after the conclusion of the second Round Table Conference, was pretty frank about this European-Muslim alliance. Referring to Gandhi, Sir Edward Bentall wrote: "He landed in India with empty hands.... The Muslims were a solid enthusiastic team—Ali Imam², the nationalist Muslim, caused no division. They played their cards with great skill throughout. They promised us support and they gave it in full measure. In return they asked us that we should not forget their economic plight in Bengal and we should "without pampering them" do what we could to find places for them in European firms. We (European interests) had made up our minds that the fight with the Congress was inevitable. We felt and said that the sooner it came the better, but we made up our minds that for a crushing success we should have all possible friends on our side." It seemed as if he were enunciating not only the policy of the European community, but the policy of Lord Willingdon and his government, and "we" represented both.

On the 1st of January the Christman-week revelries, for which Calcutta was then famous, and where the Willingdons were then staying, came to an end. There had been a whirl of social functions: dinners, banquets, races, cricket, polo, cocktails and finally the period ball in the house where Hastings first made love to Madame de la Porte: Belvedere Castle. After a day of rest everybody emerged refreshed. On the night of the 3rd of January the imperial forces went into action.

After the arrest of Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel in Bombay,

² A distinguished Muslim lawyer of mixed liberal nationalist views, who attended the Round Table Conference.

platoons of armed policemen swooped over the whole country. Before the Congress could mobilize its supporters or organize any kind of civil disobedience, all top Congress leaders were placed under arrest. For the first time the Congress and all its associate organizations were declared "unlawful". Their premises and records were seized, their property and any funds they had in banks were confiscated. Congress flags wherever seen were torn down. Anyone wearing the Gandhi cap was in danger of attracting the metal-end of a police lathi. The truncheon of a paid hooligan, the knob of an Anglo-Indian cane, or even the bare fist of a vagrant goonda, were ready for action.

It was the 26th of January, which in the Congress calendar was designated the day of independence. The news had got round that a flag hoisting would be done on the Clock Tower in Chandni Chowk.³ Mounted police, foot police, police with lathis, in uniform and without uniform, several gangs of notorious ruffians and goondas, had conspicuously collected all over the place. Thousands of curious bystanders had crowded in the bazar, on shop roofs, on the balconies and in the lawns of the neighbouring municipal hall. Before even the first batch of volunteers could arrive, half a dozen beatings had already been administered to stray bystanders. The volunteers then came from all directions in batches of five carrying the national flag, lustily singing "Jhanda Uncha Rahe Hamara". Thousands of bystanders joined in the chorus, and shouted "Azad Hind Zindabad". Echoing and re-echoing from the walls, these words thundered through the marketplace. After all the batches had collected in the square, suddenly there was breathless silence in which even the sound of shifting hoofs of the horses of the mounted police could be heard. One could feel a sense of tension creeping over one's spine and charging through the bones. As the first batch advanced to the tower to hoist the flag, it was formally ordered to disperse. It refused. It was arrested. Then followed the second and the third. It was, I think, after the sixth or the seventh batch had been arrested

³ The central marketplace of Delhi.

that two missiles came flying from an adjoining roof. They fell a few yards from the assembled group of officers in the Chowk. This was the "timely" act of a "helpful hand". In "self-defence" the mounted police, the armed police, the police with lathis and truncheons, the goondas and the ruffians, charged into the crowd, beating down indiscriminately all that came their way, leaving several wounded and disabled. Many were crushed under horses' hoofs. Apart from joining in the fray, the goondas made away with purses, watches and women's jewellery in the *melee*. Two young men became the centre of a concentrated lathi charge and were seen receiving hundreds of blows on their hands, their legs, their backs, shouting with every blow the slogan "Azad Hind Zindabad". Finally, both of them fell bleeding all over, but still saying in their fading consciousness "Inquilab Zindabad".⁴

After the crowd had dispersed, the mounted police and the danda police retired to the neighbouring police station for a sumptuous tea that had been specially laid out for them. It was the generous reward for a "brave" job brutally well done! The district magistrate and his colleagues hurried back to an early Scotch and soda to celebrate the victory. The hirelings and the hooligans left with their booty, to ply their normal trade of opium peddling, running gambling dens, planning dacoities or trading women. The evening shadows lengthened as the last rays of the sun bathed the Clock Tower in a fading lustre. Then suddenly there echoed through the streets the deep, lusty sounds of women's voices singing in a melodious chorus with carefree nonchalance, "Jhanda Uncha Rahe Hamara—Is Jhande ke niche nirbhay.... Jhanda Uncha Rahe Hamara!" After well-modulated pauses they would raise the familiar slogans in which hundreds of passers-by, whose number soon rose into thousands, joined with fresh excitement and ever-increasing intensity. Once again the walls echoed back the refrain. Women in saffron coloured saris converged through the lanes and the by-lanes, in small batches. At their head was a lean, tall, stately lady, Satyavati, known as the Jeanne d'Arc of Delhi. She was carry-

⁴ K. Nair and Brij Krishan, two Gandhi ashramites.

ing in her hands, on a pole, the national tri-colour. The few policemen that had remained behind on duty were non-plussed. The batches joined together. The singing became even more melodious and ecstatic. Satyavati advanced up to the Clock Tower and in an improvised niche planted the national flag. By this time police reinforcements had arrived. The officers had returned, snatched away from their "Scotch and soda". Without even the formality of ordering the ladies to disperse, the police with their truncheons and lathis fell on the groups. They made mad sallies at the collected spectators. Many women fell down wounded. Some stood up to the blows as long as they could. But the boldest and bravest of them, Satyavati, stood by the implanted national flag, holding it firmly and defiantly in her hands. When an attempt was made to pull it down, she struggled against several policemen. Finally, she fell down under the impact of heavy blows. Even then she lay down flat, over the flag, the staff clutched in her hands. She still raised the cry: "Azad Hindustan—Zindabad". Then she lay unconscious.

My paper had already been called upon to furnish securities of five, ten, and twenty thousand rupees. The next punishment under the new ordinance could be confiscation of the Press and its property. The *Hindustan Times*, like most other nationalist papers, being keen on survival, became colourless. As an Editor I had become a political risk to the new vested interests that controlled it. I resigned.

I was just trying to forget my state of joblessness, and getting the bulletin going, when I received commands that I had been appointed General Secretary of the Congress. I and others who were available were asked to take immediate steps, in the name of the Congress, to form a Reception Committee, and announce a date for holding the Congress session in Delhi and to send out invitations to committees all over India. The Congress was now an "unlawful" association. Any one even organizing a meeting in its name risked arrest. To undertake to arrange a formal annual session was like taking up the biggest challenge against government. As if this

was not ironical enough in my present predicament, I was further informed that Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the erstwhile chairman of the board of directors of my paper, had been nominated President of the Delhi session. The orders had come and they had to be obeyed. A Reception Committee was formed. A formal office of the Congress was opened, but all the work of arranging for the session, issuing of circulars and invitations, was done in complete secrecy. The ninth of April was fixed as the day for the Congress session. We worked day and night in secret to complete the arrangements, fearing that any of us may be arrested any time.

The Government took up the challenge in right earnest. The whole executive machinery all over India was put into motion to see that the Congress session was not held. More than ten thousand policemen were imported to Delhi from neighbouring provinces. The largest number were encamped in the municipal gardens, between Chandni Chowk and the railway station. Every one entering Delhi by road transport or on foot was searched, questioned, and if suspected, detained. Quite a few thousands were thus arrested before reaching Delhi. But more than a thousand of the invitees did arrive. They came hidden in hay carts. They came disguised as milkmen. They forded the Jamuna with improvised milk pitchers on their heads. They came in police uniforms. They entered as marriage parties under the guidance of secret cells. All of them were lodged in houses in lanes and bylanes in the heart of the city.

Pandit Malaviya arrived by car from Ghaziabad. It had been arranged that he be escorted in a big procession. We had declared that the session would be held "in Chandni Chowk, under the Clock Tower". This the police believed was only a bluff. The Sikhs held a grand Diwan on the morning of the 9th in their Gurdwara adjacent to the Central Police Station and located on the Jamuna side of the Clock Tower. As the Diwan adjourned, the entire congregation made its way towards the Jamuna bridge to receive the Congress President. Hundreds of mounted and foot police followed. A few thousand people had already collected on the banks of the Jamuna, as much for their

morning dip, as to receive the President. The presidential procession, followed by a few thousand villagers, entered the railway bridge. Here Pandit Malaviya and his colleagues were arrested. It had been so simple, thought the officers. A general order to disperse the crowd was given.

The secret cell had been at work in the meantime.⁵ From the dark narrow lanes and by-lanes emerged, from their hide-outs, more than eight hundred men and women delegates hailing from various parts of the country. A few thousand local delegates and spectators joined them under the Clock Tower in Chandni Chowk. A few minutes after Malaviya, the President designate, had been arrested, a millowner from Ahmedabad, Seth Ranchoddas, was elected president. The National Anthem was sung. The Congress flag was hoisted. The President made a brief speech. Resolutions were moved, seconded and adopted. Not a policeman was in sight! The neighbouring camp where a few thousand of them were lodged was empty. A few secret service men, however, rushed to the nearby Kotwali to break the news. Before the last resolution could be moved, fixing the next date for the Congress session, lorry loads of policemen and officers rushed in dozens of cars. A platoon of mounted police, swooped down on the gathered audience and let loose a blitz of lathis. The delegates were cordoned off, loaded into commandeered trucks and sent to prison. For more than two hours pandemonium prevailed. Hundreds claiming to be Congress delegates demanded to be arrested. No provision had been made for so many prisoners. I with a hundred others had been arrested the night before. The District Magistrate, a friend of mine, came to the jail the next day and jokingly called out, "Where is Mr Scarlet Pimpernell?"

I was in prison again. With more than a hundred other eminent colleagues we were huddled together in open barracks, ordinarily used as a factory for weaving carpets. Several thousand others were penned in a barbed-wire stockade. Pandit Malaviya, however, became a problem. He was in delicate

⁵ Under a Sindhi Congressman lent to us—Lalji Mehrotra. He later became India's Ambassador to Japan.

health. He was given VIP treatment. A canopy was spread over the roof of the room in which he was lodged to keep down the temperature. He ate food cooked only by a Malaviya. His cook had to be sought and placed under temporary arrest to do his cooking. He spent nine days before he was released, not because his offence was less serious, but because his orthodox ceremonies and rituals paralysed the Jail administration.

Prison was, however, prison for the hundred thousand and more, and no "damn nonsense". Jailors had been specially warned to be severe with the prisoners. By the end of May the temperature in Delhi rose to 114°F. Life in an open shed, covered with corrugated sheets and ventilated on both sides by heavy iron grills, can very well be imagined. One young man impishly remarked to the Jail Superintendent that the roof could very well serve as a pan for frying eggs without fire. He was sentenced to a dozen stripes of the whip for "procuring" eggs against jail rules. The eggs had been only in the young man's hungering imagination! A whole lot of young prisoners were ordered to be removed to the open stockade. They resisted. More than two hundred police and jail staff fell on them like beasts, bashed their heads and shoulders against walls, kicked into their groins and backs, flogged them with knotted ropes, tied them in gunny sacks, and carried them away in lorries. The lot of women was even worse. The jail staff was recruited from women criminals, detained for murder, kidnapping, dope peddling or maintaining brothels. They were the lowest scum of society: vulgar, uncouth, lecherous. For being more than normally vulgar, uncouth and rude, they were promised remissions of sentences and other concessions. Women prisoners had to suffer their insults and abuse without protest.

On August 17 Ramsay Macdonald announced the "Communal Award". It characterised the depressed classes as a separate permanent minority. This, Gandhi had said at the Round Table Conference, he would not permit, even if he had to lay down his life. He informed Ramsay Macdonald that he planned, from the 20th of September, to go on a "perpetual fast unto death" unless in the meantime the Award was revised.

Five days later the Cabinet sat to consider the alternative proposals sent jointly by the representatives of caste Hindus and depressed classes. On the evening of the fifth day the Cabinet altered the Award, accepting the joint recommendations which had the approval of Gandhi. Gandhi broke his fast. The whole of India breathed a sigh of relief.

13

Plutocrats and Harijans

Parankuti¹ was an Italian style mansion located on a ridge in the city of Poona. Its rising marble stairs meandered through lotus pools, fountains and flower beds, hedged in by multi-coloured crotos and bougainvillaea. At a considerable distance stood Yerwada Jail. Lady Thakersey, the owner, was a fabulously rich widow with a penchant for social work. She was a great admirer of Gandhi. After release on the first day of his fast Gandhi shifted to this villa. He was perhaps attracted to it as much for its euphemistic name as by the personal devotion of the owner.

After the fast Gandhi called a conference of all members of the "illegal" All India Congress Committee, and some other eminent leaders who were out of prison. Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad and several others were still in jail. I attended as a leader from Delhi and as one of the members of the A.I.C.C. One of the highlights of the conference was the wedding of Gandhi's son, Devdass. Devdass married Laxmi, the daughter of Raja-gopalachari. There had been considerable opposition to the marriage, first by Rajaji and then by some of the Brahmins in South India, because the boy belonged to the Vaishya caste.² It all seemed so queer in the context of Gandhiji's fast. Even more ironical was the solemn vow Gandhiji administered to the couple, to observe complete celibacy till "Swaraj" was attained.

¹ Hut of peace.

² Traders.

The couple with equal solemnity repeated the vow. They produced five children before India became independent.

The Conference sat for three days. I now met Gandhiji for the first time since he had left Simla to catch the boat for the Round Table Conference. He had, meanwhile, undergone two fasts and a prolonged imprisonment. And yet, be it said to his amazing powers of recovery, he was looking healthier than when he had left Simla. He gratefully smiled at my compliments. Those assembled got a full report from the leaders of the repressive measures, the assaults, the *lathi* charges, the floggings, the whippings and the wholesale confiscation of property in their respective provinces. One thing was apparent. Except for a few enthusiasts, it was generally agreed that the movement was at a low ebb. If a face-saving device could be found, it should be called off. At the conference I discovered that jail life had emphasized certain new tendencies among the leaders. Some of the younger men, unwilling to resume civil disobedience, held as an excuse "ideological differences". They quoted Engels and Marx to support the diversion to a class struggle. M. S. Aney, the then President, and some veterans, with former parliamentary experience, were for opening a second front by reviving the Council entry programme and "wrecking the proposed constitution from within".

I met for the first time, at the Conference, Bulabhai Desai. He had only recently given up his fabulous practice at the bar. He had been Advocate-General of Bombay. Next to Sarojini Naidu, he was perhaps the most rational mind at the Conference. But he was not of the stuff of which revolutionaries are made. A fair, bald Gujarati brahmin, Bulabhai was every inch a gentleman. He was a persuasive speaker, a man of incisive logic, of great personal charm, and of outstanding ability. He was signally free from humbug and hypocrisy, which had then become characteristic of many leaders who presumed to out-Gandhi by practising some of his fads, and offering silent support to his views, having few opinions of their own. Bulabhai had the makings of a great parliamentarian and diplomat. He had a robust sense of humour, and in

his approach to problems he was essentially practical. While different groups expressed conflicting views, it was finally left to Gandhi to decide the next step.

Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy for an interview, but received a rebuff. To save face Gandhi initiated individual civil disobedience. He refused to obey an order served on him not to leave Poona. To proliferate the campaign of individual civil disobedience, he disbanded the Sabarmati Ashram, to which he had not returned since his march to Dandi. Gandhi was sentenced to two years. Once again he threatened a fast if he was not permitted freedom to carry on Harijan work from prison. Again he was set free. This time he felt a "moral" obligation not to participate in any political activity till the end of the term to which he had been sentenced. With Gandhi on tour and Nehru, Subhas Bose, Patel and Rajendra Prasad in prison, moderately-inclined Congressmen like Rajagopalachari, Aney, Malaviya, Bulabhai Desai got busy in "behind the scenes" negotiations to persuade like-minded Congressmen to revert to Council entry and at the same time to persuade Government to restore Congress to its legal status.

Within the Congress the "Insurance" interests were now doing exceedingly well. What were just mushroom companies started by Congress leaders earlier had become fabulously rich organizations, with the diversion of business from foreign companies under pressure of the boycott movement. Many businessmen started new insurance companies with Congress leaders as dummy directors. Some of the princes saw in this an opportunity for good investment, and profitable contacts. Next to promoting the cause of the cotton mill-owners through Swadeshi, the promotion of indigenous insurance now became one of the ancillary purposes of the Congress movement. Even Nehru at one time was tempted to accept the directorship of one of the Companies. Perhaps the worst! Subhas also was unwittingly caught in the same net. Both got out rather ingloriously, having chosen strange bedfellows for company. In later years they were to see some of their old colleagues go to prison not in defiance of the Government, but for defiance

of moral codes and for the most daring frauds and unscrupulous practices, involving lakhs. The insurance interests introduced queer Tammany Hall practices, in trying to establish a hold on the organization. They also preferred Council entry to jail entry.

14

Congress Disowns Gandhi

Gandhi had called off civil disobedience! He said in doing so that, if and when it became necessary, he and "he alone" would have the sole right to offer individual civil disobedience. Willingdon however wanted complete surrender and no "face-saving". His parting words to some people who were negotiating behind the scenes were: "It is for them to choose. They can have the Congress declared legal, if Gandhi withdraws his threat of individual civil disobedience, or if he agrees not to associate the Congress with any such action". The question was: Would Gandhi agree to Willingdon's humiliating demand? Would he now declare that he retained the right to individual disobedience, only on a personal basis, and "not on behalf of the Congress"? Dr Ansari was persuaded by Asaf Ali and Bulabhai to accompany a deputation to meet Gandhi. Dr Ansari was most reluctant. He even said that it was better that the Congress should remain illegal, than that a direct or indirect attempt be made to persuade Gandhi to alter his original statement. But the legal mind is very subtle. "Supposing Gandhi himself did not want his statement to mean what the government is interpreting it to mean?" So they left, a galaxy of able lawyers, on a grand mission of quibbling, with Ansari the least convinced of the whole lot, to "bell the cat". Among them were Bulabhai Desai, the prospective leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, C. Rajagopalachari, the prospective Chief Minister of Madras, K. M. Munshi, Nariman preparing for Chief Ministership of Bombay, and a few others.

The record of the meeting, the questions and answers make interesting reading.

Gandhi: Is it the impression also among those that are here? Is it your desire that the Congress should wash its hands of civil disobedience as restricted to me?

C.R.: Is the Congress going to disown him?

Gandhi: It would be possible, if it was my advice that civil disobedience should be undertaken by me not on behalf of the Congress but on my own account.

Bulabhai: It may be possible to put it to Gandhiji, as the desire of the Congress, "Will you please relieve us? We are unable to bear the burden!"

Gandhi: I want to know two things: first, whether I am misunderstood; secondly, whether it is the desire of the bulk of the Congressmen that I should not go further than this.

C.R.: They had a doubt as to whether a majority of Congressmen would accept the advice. Let us only think whether we want to disown Gandhiji.

Gandhi: The Congressmen do not want to disown me. They want this accommodation from me. If that is so, I must give them that accommodation. If there is such a desire on the part of the majority of Congressmen, I must do so.¹

It hurt him. It was like Judas telling Jesus that unless all his disciples were willing he should desist from any action that should take him to the Cross, and not burden them with the responsibility of his impending martyrdom!

The Congress was declared legal on June 6, 1934. Gandhi concluded his Harijan tour on August 2. The Indian National Congress met under the Presidentship of Babu Rajendra Prasad in the first week of October in Bombay. This was the first regular session after Karachi. Vallabhbhai and Abdul Ghaffar Khan had in the meantime been set free. Jawaharlal was still in jail. Broken down in health, Subhas

¹ Tendulkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. III, pp. 321-23.

had gone abroad for treatment. To the uncritical eye the session was a miracle. Big business had obviously opened its purse-strings wide to insure a spectacular success. It was also something of a miracle, for an organization which was unlawful till June to complete a half-a-million membership list, hold all the elections, and produce nearer five thousand delegates for the session. But the miracle did not impress Gandhi. He wrote: "The acrimony with which Congress elections have been fought in some places, and the unclean methods used and adopted by the Congress workers by manipulating votes, and grossly abusing the rule about the habitual wearing of khadi have filled me with horror and dismay." This was a very restrained criticism of the blatantly corrupt practices that were adopted in several places to create bogus membership lists, to hold fictitious elections to put caucus supporters in office, and to gerrymander, by caucus nominees, district and provincial committees. All this was done to so manipulate the organizational set up that, at the time of elections, the sacrifices of millions and the prestige of the great Congress name could be used to advance the candidature of "chosen" Congress nominees. While the true patriots had practically lost their all, and only a few of them could find the resources even for a third-class travel to Bombay, the favoured ones were rushed by Insurance bosses in reserved second and first-class compartments, even in special trains, to present the human miracle of more than five thousand duly elected delegates reaching Bombay to vote for Council entry. The smell of office and the lure of seats in the Assembly brought with it the horrible odour of corruption, a lot of washing of dirty linen, charges and counter-charges, damaging the prestige of the Congress and the image of Congress leaders in the eyes of the public.

As some of the Congress delegates passed by Gandhi, his shrewd eyes saw through a lot of make-believe and fake show of khadi. He recognized many familiar faces which bore the marks of suffering, sacrifice and torture. He also saw khadi garments improvised over silk socks and polished Oxfords and silk sleeves peering out of khadi achkans. Gandhi put forward

some test amendments and resolutions to be sure that at least in essence and in spirit the Congress had not changed. His constitutional amendment, substituting truth and non-violence in place of "peaceful and legitimate" in the creed of the Congress was adroitly postponed. He wanted every Congress member to spin a certain amount of yarn. This was diluted by substituting for spinning "any kind of approved labour". He wanted only "habitual wearers of khadi" to stand for elective posts. This was accepted, since whether a person was a "habitual" or a "casual" wearer would be determined by those in command, and it could be a useful weapon to keep undesirables out.

Gandhi realized that he was now wanted by the leaders more as a symbol for winning the elections than as a leader to lay down the rules. He did not want to be a mere symbol. At the end of the session he announced his decision to withdraw from the Congress even as a four-anna member. Sixty thousand people, delegates and visitors got up to pay their last homage. He saw through the mockery of it all. He wistfully smiled. With folded hands and a stab in his heart, he walked out of the *pandal*. India was at his feet, but he had nowhere to go. The Sabarmati Ashram had been disbanded. His tour was at an end. He proceeded to Wardha. From Wardha he walked six miles to Sevagaon to start life anew in a small thatched hut, away from the highways, removed from any railway track with not even a post office or a dispensary nearby—a palmleaf fan alone to keep away the flies, and to keep him cool, a kerosene lamp for light, his devoted wife and a few faithfuls to share the burden of his Cross.

Meanwhile a group of radical young men and women, more vocal than their numbers could justify, had formed a socialist group within the Congress. Acharya Narendra Dev, the head of the Kashi Vidyapith, was a radical-thinking intellectual. He was a man of simple habits and ardent patriotism. He hated organized religion, considered capitalism a curse, and had abundant love for the underdog. Jai Prakash Narayan, a Wisconsin graduate, was a devoted patriot, an enlightened

socialist, and firm in his belief that unless the old guard was swept away no revolution could succeed. "What is the programme they have put before the country?" he had asked Nehru.² "The only plan we may conceive of is that we must spin more and do other soul-stirring things." Yusuf Mehrally was a brilliant young Muslim, intensely patriotic and progressive. Minoo Masani was a "book socialist" who later stepped from socialism to capitalism. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was a brave fighter in the national struggle, but always out of favour with the old guard. Satyawati, an indomitable champion of the cause of labour in Delhi, Aruna Asaf Ali who later turned to communism, Farid Ansari, Achhut Patwardhan, Purshottam Trikumdas—were all a fine enlightened set, though inclined to err on the side of the theoretical. They vied with each other in quoting western thinkers and philosophers: Lenin, Engels, Marx, bracketing even Bakunin with Brailsford, showing off a great deal of undigested knowledge with a fluent use of socialist phraseology. But little of what they said was of practical application to the immediate needs of the country.

Subhas Chandra Bose was most prominent among the "radicals". Nehru felt nearer to him than to the others, though not close enough. He was different. Subhas was a man of action. He was intensely interested in international affairs and was socialist of a type. I had known Subhas and his brother Sarat rather intimately. Next to Gandhi and Nehru, he struck me as the most courageous, fearless and self-sacrificing patriot in the country and the least given to make-believe and humbug. If occasion required he could willingly march to the gallows with a smile on his face. Unlike Nehru he was deeply religious. Unlike Gandhi he was willing to encourage violence if it would yield the most effective results. While he had the utmost regard for Nehru, he was also jealous of Nehru. He did want a Nehru-Subhas axis to be established but only if Nehru could break away from the old guard. This, Nehru felt, in the existing circumstances meant breaking away from the Congress. Gandhi was different. The present Congress to him was

² Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Letters*, Nov. 23, 1938.

his own creation. Even if he had walked out of the Congress, he still controlled it. He probably felt that he could influence it more from the outside than by remaining in it. But the Congress was for Nehru a medium, a powerful channel of activity, an organization through which he could reach the masses, and forge the sanctions for freedom. Instead of breaking away from the Congress, he felt it would be better to wait for an opportunity when it may be possible to dilute the hold and the influence of the old guard, and orientate its policies towards more radical and dynamic objectives.

Nehru was in Europe, recovering from the shock of the loss of his dear wife, when he was informed that he had been unanimously elected President of the Congress. The session was fixed to be held in October, a few weeks hence. The general elections were in the offing. Should he refuse the offer and quit the Congress, or accept and become the prisoner of the reactionary elements that controlled it, were the alternatives facing him. As if he had read his mind, and anticipated his doubts, a letter from Gandhi from Sevagaon³ enabled him to take a decision. "All will be well," Gandhi had said, "if you will never lose your humour, and make up your mind to stay out your period.... That is my confirmed opinion. When like your father you feel that you are ready to take sole charge of the Congress, I think that from the present company you will find no opposition." Nehru decided to take the risk.

*Dated July 30, 1936.

15

The Raid of the Rodents

The average count was three *chaprasis* to one Congress Minister. Five for every Chief Minister. Nehru had once called "khadi the livery of freedom!" Gandhi was ecstatic. "Your calling khadi the 'livery of freedom' will live as long as we speak the English language in India."¹ The elections had resulted in Congress ministries assuming office in all the provinces. The Ministers and newly-elected members had arrived for a joint conference called by the Congress President² in Delhi. Each Minister entered the *pand'l* ostentatiously attended by his quota of *chaprasis* carrying files, brief cases, or sealed boxes containing "secret papers". It seemed like the old-time Nawabs coming to a wedding with their retinue, one holding a fan, another the *hukka*, one the 'pandan'³ and still another the chest of scents to be used at appropriate occasions! Apart from the pompousness associated with this display of attendants, the scene, as Mrs Naidu humorously remarked, lead to a lot of confusion. In the "livery of freedom", she said, "it is difficult to distinguish a *chaprasi* from a Minister, and a Minister from a *chaprasi*." It was only when Nehru asked those who were not Ministers, or members, to leave the central floor that one could identify the Ministers and get a count of the army of *chaprasis* they had brought with them.

Out of the one thousand or more open general seats the

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru. *A Bunch of Letters*, July 30, 1937, p. 245.

² Jawaharlal Nehru.

³ Betel leaf-case.

Congress had captured about seven hundred. I discovered, as I moved around among the members, a lot of old friends, and many familiar faces. Quite a few had played a prominent part in the struggle and mostly belonged to the group loyal to the old guard. Some were able, intelligent and capable. Among the rest, I saw a couple of talukdars from U.P., a few business tycoons from Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta and Kanpur, a few old loyalists, and an assortment of nondescripts who had no politics, but had inherited money without intelligence. "How did you get in?" I asked a talukdar. "I made a bargain," he said, "I stood from a reserved constituency. I assured the Congress that if they did not put up a candidate against me and I was elected unopposed, I will not only join the Congress, but also pay for the election of two other candidates. I joined the Congress only last week." One, who had lost a rich father and left college to seek election, said that he had paid two hundred thousand to "buy" a safe constituency. It was the same story with some others. A business tycoon from Kanpur had paid for five elections, and was aspiring to become a Minister "at the next opportunity." "Come to my hotel tonight," he invited. "We are having a celebration." I accepted and went. I was surprised to see freshly-labelled bottles of whisky, brandy, beer and gin on the side-table. A group of the "newly elected" were celebrating their success. "What will you have?" my host asked. "We have the Morarji cocktail, Azad's delight, Nehru's Three Star, and Ganges Water." "Ganges Water," I discovered, was gin. It was most popular as it could be taken openly. Morarji cocktail was gin and gin-gerale. Azad's delight had the label of a popular brand of Scotch. Nehru Three Star was Cognac.

On Gandhi's advice, the Working Committee directed that Ministers should take a salary "up to Rs. 500 and Councillors Rs. 70 per month." In view of this directive, neither the Viceroy nor the Governors interfered with the "discretion of the Ministers" regarding their salaries and emoluments. They left them free to take any decision they liked. The Cabinet put the "cash" salary of Ministers at Rs. 500 per month but in

addition allotted to Ministers a free furnished house, free water, electricity and garden maintenance and free transport for private and public use. These perquisites ran into a couple of thousand rupees per month. The British Governors also allowed Ministers to have their own choice of houses, furniture and cars, partly to expose the Working Committee to further public ridicule, and partly to win defectors. All Chief Ministers and Ministers alike made an undignified scramble for the largest and the most spacious bungalows. Lakhs were spent in equipping them with air-conditioners, refrigerators, and expensive furniture. Several thousands were further spent to pander to ministerial hypocrisy : putting up *khadi* curtains and covering expensive silk upholstery with drab, badly cut, unintelligently selected *khadi* covers. The *khadi* covers and curtains soon began to show patches of hair oil, betelnut stains, and drippings of "Quink". in between a milky-way of roses, jasmines and lotuses. They neither indicated simplicity nor represented the artistic. This mockery of "Rs. 500" shocked Gandhi.

During his whirlwind election campaign there was one province Nehru had been prevented from visiting : The Frontier. During the Harijan tour even Gandhi was not allowed a visit. We now visited it together after the Congress ministry had been installed. It was a real pilgrimage of discovery. Having been born in a neighbouring district (Rawalpindi), the Frontier was for me like my home province. I had often been to Peshawar and parts of the Frontier since my childhood, and several times during the struggle. I had witnessed the birth of the Red Shirt movement. I had spent six months in prison with Abdul Ghaffar Khan in neighbouring cells. I had stayed at his home in Utmanzai. More than six-and-a-half feet tall, with a grizly beard, close-cropped hair, large ears, sloping shoulders, high cheek-bones, deep sunk eyes, long hands and a gracious smile, Abdul Ghaffar Khan was every inch a Pathan—hardy, brave, fearless. His brother, Khan Sahib, was different. He had a European wife, lived well, earned a decent income, and in his spare time helped his brother in organizing the Red Shirts. Khan Sahib had known Nehru at Cambridge.

During the elections, without the help of outside leaders, and without the aid of "secret" funds, the Congress as represented by the Red Shirts had swept the polls. Curiously enough even leaders of the High Command did not realize that this was by far the greatest achievement of the Congress. It did not strike them that the Red Shirts had knocked out the theory, paraded by the Muslim League and the British, of Muslim separatism. The Frontier population was eighty-five per cent Muslim. The Frontier was politically and educationally backward. But the Muslims of the Frontier had proved that they were as strongly behind the demand for Indian freedom as the people of any other province. The Muslim League hardly had a look-in. In effect it did not exist. Even Nehru realized the tremendousness of this achievement only during this first visit.

We were returning from the Khyber Pass when our procession of cars stopped at Landi Kotal, a tribal centre. "Here live on one side the Afridis, and on the other the Waziris," said Khan Sahib. "They made war whenever the British wanted. They descended on Peshawar to loot and plunder whenever the signal was given. But they are now law-abiding and a lot of them are Red Shirts." A guard of honour was presented by the Red Shirts to Nehru. Then followed several veteran "Khans", each carrying a large "tray" under a silk cover. It was tea-time. Nehru liked his afternoon tea. He, however, made some apologetic remarks as to why so many trays should have been arranged when just a cup would have sufficed. "Oh, we will have tea further on," remarked Khan Sahib. One of the Khans advanced and after a respectful bow presented a "tray". Under the cover was, not a tea tray, but a mammoth bread, an inch thick, stuffed with raisins, ginger and spices. Nehru laughed at the joke. But, seeing the solemn face of Khan Sahib, asked: "What do I do with it?" "You have to take a piece from every bread, eat it, touch the silk scarf with your forehead, bow and return the bread and the scarf. This is symbolic of their hospitality to an honoured guest. Each bread represents the village of a Khan. It will be

distributed with other breads that the villagers have prepared to all the homes in memory of your visit," Khan Sahib explained. Nehru was overwhelmed. After the last Khan had retired, a tall woman, wrapped from tip to toe in a *burqa*, advanced and placed a garland around Nehru's neck. Nehru bowed very low and made a Muslim-style obeisance, thinking that she must be the wife of the chief Khan, or a very exalted lady, since she was the only one of her sex to make this offering. "This lady," Abdul Ghaffar Khan explained, "is the head school-mistress. She is a 'Hindu Pathan'. She was chosen by the ladies, because orthodox Muslim women are not supposed to garland strangers." Nehru looked surprised! A "Hindu Pathan" was for him a discovery.

We were to be the guests for a night of one of the Khans in an inland tribal village beyond Charssada, just to see what village life was like. As a precaution Nehru suggested that we take our bedrolls along. I kept these in the boot of my car. While he went with the Khan Brothers, Upadhyaya, his Secretary, I and my party⁴ followed behind. As we reached the village, I found Nehru anxiously waiting for me. As soon as we stopped, he rushed to my car, and in a peremptory whisper said, "Keep those bedrolls locked. Not a word about them to anyone." Saying this he casually joined the others. We were all duly escorted to the "guest house". Simple though the place was, it was spacious. Some of the costliest carpets covered every floor. There was a bed for every guest. "While the Khan maintains the guest house," explained Abdul Ghaffar Khan, "village women weave bedspreads and covers and keep the guest house fully supplied. It is a sort of cooperative. When an honoured guest comes, every sheet, carpet, quilt, pillow is supplied clean, and for the chief guests new. That is our simple tradition of hospitality!" Nehru gave a suggestive wink, and I realized why he was so anxious to see that the travel soiled bedrolls did not make their tell-tale appearance.

Nehru had addressed a *mamnūh* meeting in the grand square of Kissā Khāni, the main marketplace of Peshawar. We

⁴ My son and niece.

were passing through Karimpura⁵ by foot to meet the parked cars across the street. On both sides were rows of eating houses. The smell of barbecued lamb, tandoori chicken, sizzling shish kababs and smoking pullao came to us. Burly "Pathans" were engaged in cooking, serving or eating. Nehru was these days a partial vegetarian. So also was Abdul Ghaffar under the influence of Gandhi. "I must say Muslims know how to cook meat and eat it. It smells delicious even to an amateur vegetarian," he remarked. Abdul Ghaffar laughed. "Panditji," he said, "those cooks are all Brahmins, not Muslims. These shops belong to Hindus." Nehru looked bewildered. He soon noticed the sacred thread hanging from the neck of one of the men in a neighbouring shop, who was without a shirt. "I wish," he said, "I could send Jinnah, Mohammed Yakub, Pandit Malaviya, Dr Moonje and a whole group of Muslim Leaguers, Hindu Mahasabites and Congressmen to see what Pathan nationalism means!" Alas! in years to come it was not Pathan nationalism that reached India, but Muslim communalism and separatism that spread their poison to the frontier!

While being in office brought a lot of prestige to the Congress, it also led to rivalries, jealousies and corruption. The U.P. Cabinet resigned because it was not permitted to set free certain political prisoners. Gandhi intervened. The Governor was overruled by the Viceroy. The right to release prisoners by the Cabinet was accepted. Soon after, in the Central Provinces, the Minister of Justice, in exercise of this right, set free a very "highly placed person". He had been charged and duly sentenced to long imprisonment for the most despicable and heinous of crimes: rape. Clemency was extended to an influential "prisoner who had been guilty of an insurance fraud". Dr Khare, Chief Minister of C.P., sounded the first serious warning of indiscipline in the ministerial ranks. Dr Khare was a patriot of the Tilak School. Short, slovenly and delightfully impish, he wore an unusually short shirt and wide pyjamas which were always in a state of maladjustment—a sort of two-tier arrangement. It was his idea of simplicity!

⁵ A market abounding in food shops.

Soon after he became Chief Minister, Khare decided to choose between the Governor as head of the Government and Sardar Patel, head of the Parliamentary Board. He found Sardar Patel insufferable. He chose the former. In order to eliminate one of his inconvenient colleagues, a favourite of Vallabhbhai, he sent in the resignation of the Cabinet. With the consent of the Governor, he formed another Cabinet overnight. He was later overthrown by the Congress majority. Khare a few years later was nominated to the Viceroy's council.

Vallabhbhai Patel at this time became the most powerful person in the Congress. He was not the most loved, but he was certainly the most feared among the top Congress leaders. He was a man of iron will, and deep prejudices. With him the country came first, Vallabhbhai second, Congress third, and there was no fourth. He was ruthless in enforcing discipline. He was not afraid of taking action against Congressmen, big or small, chopping off the dead wood, throwing out of office, and even out of the Congress, men accused of corruption and indiscipline. Favourites only excepted! Unfortunately in some cases it was difficult to tell who had offended more, the favourites or the victims.

Nariman was not a socialist, but one of the noblest of patriots, idolized by the people of Bombay. He had a hero's record of suffering and sacrifice for the cause of the country. He was fearless, dauntless and like others ambitious. When a Congress Ministry was to be formed in Bombay, he felt that by ability, record of service and general popularity, he could claim to be chosen as the first Chief Minister. There were many in the Congress who shared that view. Vallabhbhai Patel did not. He preferred Balaji Kher, another outstanding and equally honest patriot. Kher was elected. Nariman protested. An inquisition was ordered. Nariman was found guilty of "canvassing" support for himself, contrary to party discipline. He did not deny the charges but pleaded that his rival and many others at the top had also openly canvassed. Nariman was declared unfit to hold any office for seven years. He was very ill when I met him last in Bombay. He was staying in a

two-room, shabby tenement in the outskirts of the city, a tubercular wreck. His greatest regret was that though the Sardar was vindictive, he did expect justice and fairplay from Gandhi. His sin, if any, had been common to all, but his services were almost unique. He died soon after—a political outcaste.

Disgusted with corruption, groupism and the scramble for power, Nehru who had gone to Europe opened his heart to Gandhi. "For months past," he wrote to Gandhi,⁶ "I have felt I could not function effectively in India as things were going. I have carried on, of course, as one can always carry on. But I have felt out of place and a misfit." About the power lust and demoralization that had developed, he wrote, "I feel strongly that the Congress Ministries are working inefficiently and not doing much they could do.... I think there are enough men of goodwill in the Congress to cope with the situation; ... obviously bad men are preferred to good men because the former promise to toe the party line. When this happens there is bound to be deterioration."

*Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Letters*, April 8, 1938, p. 483.

16

The Billion Dollar Jewel-Box

"Your Highness", "Your Excellency", "Your Highnesses"! This was the formal form of address by which the Viceroy addressed the princes, and the rulers opened their speeches in the Chamber of Princes. Every ruler addressed the other "Bhai" (brother). Crescent-shaped, adorned with plush seats, plush curtains and red carpets, its balcony displayed eagles, peacocks, camels, lions, tigers, lotuses, elephants and fish: emblems of the different member States. The Chamber of Princes formed the third wing of the Council House, the other two being occupied by the Assembly and the Council of States. After a few years of secret sessions, early in the thirties, the Press was admitted to the Chamber. Unlike the other two plebeian houses, the press was permitted seats behind the princes on the floor of the House. Ministers, Maharances and distinguished guests sat in the balconies.

For more than three years I had found myself behind a feudal veteran, who sat in the two rows between the member princes and the Press reserved for rulers of smaller States. He became my guide, philosopher and friend. His manner of introducing some of the conspicuous members of this "billion dollar jewel-box" was most informal and anecdotal. "At our extreme left on the front seat, the one with the gorgeous multi-coloured turban, a British sergeant's whiskers, heavy eyebrows, and the gestures of a professional actor is Ganga Singh, Maharaja of Bikaner. He hopes to rule Bikaner longer than Queen Victoria. He has already done more than

fifty years in the *gaddi*. He is better known for the Bikaner Railway which travels at the speed of two to five miles an hour, the camel battery which can manoeuvre in the desert better than tanks, the Bikaner carpet, a sort of bird-weave made out of thousands of wild grouse shot during a Viceregal visit at his lake resort in Gajner, and the Ganga Canal. He was the first Chancellor of the Chamber. Sitting next to him is the Nawab of Bhopal, who has also been Chancellor. He is the first male ruler of the State, a born politician, with friends in the Conservative Party in London, and the Congress Party in Delhi. He has spent more money building a new city across the lake for himself and his Sardars, than on rehabilitating the State. One of the longest roads he has hitherto built leads to his hunting lodge, Chiklot, in the heart of the jungle. The best symbol of his being progressive is a modern yacht club open only to himself and friends, and a fine new palace. He and his *hukka* are inseparable, except when he is at a formal banquet.

"The one who is now about to speak is the Maharaja of Alwar. He always wears breeches because he loves horses, and that peculiar boat cap with a large diamond, because it is his nearest approach to looking like a jockey. He is a fine speaker, a scholar in Sanskrit and philosophy, and a great builder. He builds palaces, but does not stay in them. The last one was built at a cost of fifteen lakhs, and pulled down as it did not come up to his aesthetic standards. A recent one will never be completed since according to his astrologer he would either die or have to abdicate the day it becomes habitable. He has a fleet of cars all in different colours, but none in black. Whenever he has to go out, all the cars are lined up with the ADC's, a whole lot with a "pansy" look in motley dresses. The cars and the ADCs are chosen to match, according to the colour that strikes him at the moment. He wears gloves because he would not like to touch the hands of all and sundry. Even when he has to shake hands with the Viceroy, he washes up with *Eu de Cologne*. A large bottle is always carried by an ADC. He dislikes slow horses and fast women, and employs

the whip unsparingly. The resources of the State have risen five times since he became ruler, but have not kept pace with expenditure. But for his abberations he would be a great leader anywhere. Incidentally (he said this *sotto voce*), there has not been a direct male descendant in the family for generations. His sex life is inexplicable. It has always been a matter of concern to the political department."

Here a short, slim, priestly-looking man entered, bowed all round and took his seat. Over a brocade *achkan* he wore a very small turban, unlike the pompous head dresses of the other maharajas. "That is the Rana of Dholpur. You see that bulge near the neck under the *achkan*? He is wearing his famous string of the finest matched pearls in the world. He used to wear them over the collar, but once the Vicerene took fancy to it, asked him to loan the string, as she went off with a partner to dance. He had an anxious time, since the Vicerene loved rare stones. But after a time, having enjoyed them around her neck, she returned the string with a gracious smile. He likes taming animals. He maintains a fine sanctuary in the hills, and keeps two tiger cubs as pets inside the living room. Even though Dholpur is a small State he is more royal than royalty. When Edward VIII was made to abdicate for marrying Mrs Simpson, he cabled to Premier Baldwin protesting against this 'wanton encroachment on the Divine Right of Kings', endangering the security of 'rulers' all over the world. When someone declared 'there will be only two king, left in the world—the King of England and the King of Spades', Dholpur observed: 'He forgets there are more than four hundred rulers in India!'

As I followed the dull proceedings, each speaker starting with compliments and ending by swearing eternal loyalty to the Crown, the veteran had gone out for a double Scotch and small soda provided free in the lobby at princely expense. He returned to his seat refreshed. "The person I was walking in with," he said, "is Holkar of Indore. He spends most of the time abroad, and leaves all the ruling to be done by Bapna, his Prime Minister. His father Yashwant Rao was more capable

but less careful. He was unlucky in love. Among others, he casually fell in love with Mumtaz, a dancing-girl of fourteen. She in turn fell in love with a Bombay millionaire, Bawla. The triangle ended when Bawla was murdered while romancing on Bombay's "hanging gardens". Suspicion fell on Yashwant Rao. He had to abdicate. He later married Miss Miller from California, leaving the State to his anaemic son. Of course, the Mumtaz scandal is nothing as compared to the £20,000 blackmail to which Hari Singh, the present ruler of Kashmir, was subjected when he visited Europe for the first time as a shy prince. One Miss Robinson suddenly claimed she was "Mrs" Robinson after they were caught nude in a Paris apartment by the supposed husband. But Hari Singh has had troubles of a different kind since. As ruler of a grand health resort, he has had difficulty getting rid of unwanted and unclaimed guests. Every year the Europeans in Gulmarg gave an annual dinner in his honour at the Gulmarg Club. He had to foot the bill. Only when the ballroom and the dining hall were 'accidentally' destroyed by fire was he relieved of this unsolicited obligation. To cut the size of parties in Srinagar he reduced the size of the ballroom in the new palace. And yet European guests are his pests. Three distinguished Europeans occupied the best house boats, and every year would leave after locking their belongings in for the winter. Like the migratory birds, they returned in summer. For the first time Kashmir experienced the 'sad spectacle' of three house boats sinking from unexplained leaks."

During the decade or so that the Chamber had been in existence, the princes had tried to lay down a basic code of conduct for the princes, and some basic standards for their administrations. The rulers were expected for example to limit their privy purses to ten or twelve per cent of the State revenue. They were persuaded to appoint capable and efficient Ministers and administrators, and to associate their people, in some manner, with the administration. But the progress had been slow. Some of the States employed fine administrators. There were men like Akbar Hydari of Hyderabad, Mirza Ismail and

Visveswara Iyer of Mysore, Manubhai Mehta and V. T. Krishnamachari of Baroda and other distinguished men who gave to the States they served an enlightened administration. But in most cases, Ministers and Dewans were chosen as much for their ability as for their willingness to serve the whims, caprices and fancies of the rulers, to find funds while they enjoyed life in India or in Europe, and to preserve law and order in the State in their absence.

Not content with indigenous means of pleasure and romance, it was common for the playboys among the rulers to go abroad, to seek pleasure and expensive diversions in Switzerland, on the Riviera, in Paris or in Monte Carlo. In the holiday resorts of Europe the "Maharaja" symbolised, in the eyes of gold-digging adventuresses and pleasure-procuring professionals, jewels, extravagance, leisure, perversion, wakefull nights and sleepless days, and a non-stop race for pleasure. A maharaja, who had spent most of his seventy-five years in France, finally leased a swimming pool to enjoy the last days of his life, seeing youthful bodies taking their dive into the water, and to hear the giggles of love-makers around him. Entry was free but only to guests chosen by the ADCs. One maharaja made it a practice to take his horses and his Polo team with him, to earn renown in Polo, while he sought diversions in other directions. All sorts of stories and scandals spread about the extravagance and fast living of the rulers, and gradually the Congress and the States people felt agitated and concerned.

The concern became even greater when the Federal Constitution was adopted in 1935, offering to nominees of Indian States representation in the Federal Upper Chamber, and a voice in influencing certain spheres of common interest, like defence, communications, customs, indirect taxes, etc. According to Nehru, a democratic India and autocratic rulers could not co-exist. At least they could not be common participants in a federal structure. For that reason alone, he declared, the federal constitution should be wrecked. He therefore felt it imperative to spread the freedom movement to Indian States, by setting up Congress Committees wherever possible, and by strengthen-

ing the organization of the Indian States People's Conference, of which by now he had been twice President. The Indian States People's Conference had some devoted workers, like Abhyankar, a bold Maharashtrian, Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a veteran Congressman from Andhra and Shri Dhebar, a leader from Saurashtra. Sheikh Abdullah, a school teacher from Srinagar, had started the "Kashmir Muslim Conference" a decade earlier. He was tall, with a conspicuously heavy jawbone, indicating a prolific capacity for making speeches. Finding that the "Muslim" in his organization was not cutting much ice, either at home or abroad, he converted his little caucus into "The Kashmir National Conference", and joined the States People's Conference. He became its Vice-President. There were others who had been expelled for one good reason or another by their rulers and who then formed Praja Mandals. Most of these Praja Mandals and Praja Parishads existed outside the States they represented; so did some of the newly started Congress Committees. The Praja Mandals that functioned within the States, and were "approved" by the rulers, had no status in the Central organization. Similarly a few Congress Committees functioned successfully in the States, but they avoided politics, and concentrated mostly on popularising spinning and khadi. In some cases the rulers even liked them, and talked of them fondly like the Rana of Dholpur spoke of his tiger cubs, "how docile, how much under control!" It helped to hide the British and to show off their own popularity!

For more than ten years since it was started, Bhupinder Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, had been Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes. He had also become the leader and the mouth-piece of the "Princely Order". Big States like Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore and Baroda kept away from the Chamber, but their Ministers participated in the work of the more active and effective bodies—The Standing Committee and the Committee of Ministers. By virtue of being the Chancellor he presided over both. A few hundred smaller States were excluded from the Chamber. They met off and on separately, and as Chancellor the Maharaja also helped to guide their deliberations,

represent their grievances, and take up their cause with the Government.

Bhupinder Singh was an extraordinary man. Patiala was a major State in northern India, but otherwise ranked very much lower among the big ten or twelve States in the country. Yet Bhupinder Singh of Patiala was more well-known in India and abroad than any other prince, except, may be, the Nizam of Hyderabad because of his countless treasures and miserly habits, or the Gaekwar of Baroda for his enlightened and benevolent administration. His weaknesses and good qualities were mostly typical of the ruling princes. In some respects he was exceptional in both. He had all the attributes of a statesman and the lapses of a prodigal. Most princes were notorious for their love of "wine and women". They maintained a whole menagerie of wives, mistresses and concubines around them. But, except for the Nizam of Hyderabad and Patiala, very few had a hundred and two-score wives. Bhupinder Singh claimed to be the father of fifty-odd children. When someone remarked, "Patiala is a danger to pretty women", Bhupinder Singh protested, "On the contrary they are a danger to me. I have to resist them and often get high blood pressure in the process!" Wine was part of traditional princely hospitality. But the "Patiala peg" was a new measure introduced by His Highness, being the size covered by the four fingers of the guest. Bachanalian orgies were common to the princely order. But it was left to Bhupinder Singh to invoke religious sanctity for promiscuous indulgences and strange, perverse practices.

All the princes maintained one or more well-furnished guest-houses for visiting Residents, officers of the Government of India and their own friends. But it was in Patiala alone where, besides all these, at any time of the year one could meet painters, poets, authors, artists, sportsmen, philosophers, politicians of national and international fame, and listen to His Highness discussing surrealism, the abstract in art, the theories of Cobden and John Stuart Mill, the views of Nietzsche, Freud and Jung, the strategy of Machiavelli, the teachings of Chanakya, the philosophy of

Plato and the genesis of Thumri, illustrated by a fund of anecdotes and with a profoundness rare among his class.

A prince, he often said, is a prince only if he is "princely". If, therefore, his personal extravagances bordered on the scandalous, his generosity was proverbial. Once a poet, who had earned national fame, came to his court, asking for help. He had been expelled by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Patiala was passing through a financial crisis, and therefore suggested that in case he would like to settle down in the State, the Durbar could give him a free furnished house, and a monthly pension to maintain himself in comfort. The poet was grateful and agreed to settle down in Patiala. A house was duly allotted and the Education Minister was directed to fix the pension. The Minister persuaded the poet to accept a pension of two hundred rupees, saying, "More you may not get. This will be paid regularly." The poet agreed. After a few months, the Maharaja inquired from the poet, who had just recited a few of his latest compositions, as to the amount that had been fixed for his pension. On being informed of the figure, he turned to the Minister: "You can't feed a horse on that money. How do you expect a poet to live on that meagre pension?" The Minister offered financial stringency as the explanation. "If the department is short of funds, the emoluments of the Minister should be reduced by two hundred rupees till the stringency lasts and the pension of the poet doubled," said Bhupinder Singh. Then he took out a small bag of gold coins and handed it to the poet, saying, "This is my private contribution. Whenever the pension is delayed, you can always cash a few of these."

Patiala was a born politician, an impressive speaker, and a master-mind in strategy and intrigue. Having built up a loose network to cover the entire princely order, with himself as the key figure, he applied his mind to immediate problems. The princes were by no means unanimous about Federation. While some of the big States and their Ministers were persuaded by the British to favour the Federal scheme, the small and medium-sized States saw in it danger and disaster. They preferred to remain "puppets" under the Crown, so long as their existing

"rights and privileges" were safeguarded, than be totally absorbed in a Federal India. Patiala decided to make a tremendous show of supporting the Federal scheme, "provided it may be appropriately amended". At the same time he wanted it to be "wrecked". "The Congress is opposed to it. So is the Muslim League. Even the Hindu Mahasabha does not want it. The Tories in England are not happy. So we would leave the 'wrecking' to them," he explained to me at the time. "In fact the more the princes support Federation, the more strongly will the Congress oppose it. Thus we 'wreck' it by supporting it."

As if he were responding to a silent wish of Patiala, Nehru, in his Faizpur speech as Congress President, condemned this danger in emphatic terms.¹ "The Indian rulers," he said, "have succeeded to a remarkable degree and have gained extraordinary power under the federal scheme. Having preserved themselves as autocratic units, which are wholly outside the control of the rest of India, they have gained power over the other parts of India.... A sinister development is the building up of the armies of some of the bigger States on an efficient basis. Thus our opposition to the federal part of the Constitution is not merely a theoretical one, but a vital matter which affects our freedom struggle and our future destiny.... We have got to break this Federation." When the opposition in India had reached its peak, and the Tories in England were feeling profoundly perturbed, Patiala played his trump card. In a "secret" meeting of the princes and ministers, on behalf of the order, he declared: "The circumstances under which some of us agreed to consider a Federal proposal... was not from any desire to hinder British India in the realization of its legitimate aspirations, but to help India in her constitutional progress.... Responsible men in British India... have not hesitated to say that, in the present scheme of things, Indian States have become a positive hindrance rather than a help to British India.... If British India desires to go forward without

¹ Actually in the strictest confidence Nehru knew through me how the mind of Bhupinder Singh and his associates was working, but he never felt sure till the end.

the association of the States, we shall have no complaint...." The proceedings were allowed to be "leaked" out. There was a furore in London. Churchill accused the Viceroy of forcing the princes into the Federation against their will.

The princes, the Congress, the Government, were all suddenly shaken from this mood of confusion and concern about Indian States by a shock that came from a most unexpected quarter. Rajkot was not a major State of Kathiawar (Saurashtra). It was, however, a State of utmost political importance in Western India. The Resident who controlled two hundred-odd States of Kathiawar lived in Rajkot. Its ruler was a pleasant, quiet, joy-loving person, who left all the headaches of government to his Dewan, a clever ruthless but adroit administrator, Durbar Virawala. I was staying in Calcutta in the late 'thirties. During the Christmas season, a strange party of persons had temporarily tenanted a palatial house in the neighbourhood. The house was extraordinarily quiet during the day. But at night it suddenly burst into hectic activity: a shoalful of doubtful characters kept coming and going, and mixed noises of jazz music and Thumri emerged from the upper terrace. Even a cinema screen had been set up to show some forbidden movies. We of the neighbourhood naturally protested against this disturbing activity. We were very politely informed with a "thousand apologies" that the Thakur of Rajkot, the new occupant of the house, had come to "relax" from the taxing duties of the State, for the season. It was explained by the very humble secretary that a fabulous sum had already been spent in fixing up the entire programme for the month. We were all very welcome to the house if we desired to partake of the "fun". If we were, however, feeling disturbed, the ruler would be pleased to pay for rooms for us at the best local hotel, to enable us to sleep in peace.

Gandhi was born in Rajkot. The Praja Parishad had been agitating for reforms under the guidance of Vallabhbhai Patel. In a moment of political generosity the Thakur agreed to the appointment of a committee to suggest reforms in the administration, and left it to Sardar Patel to recommend the personnel.

Durbar Virawala, his Chief Minister, was as loyal to the Thakur as to Gibson, the Resident. He soon discovered that the Resident disliked the arrangement and advised the Thakur to back out. Gandhi had hoped that Rajkot would set a new pattern for Indian States to settle other disputes between Praja Parishads and their rulers. He was particularly interested because Rajkot was his home State. Gandhi appealed to the Viceroy. Gandhi was to leave for Tripuri to attend the Congress Session. He was aware of a serious crisis in the Congress. Still he decided to proceed to Rajkot as if he subconsciously wanted some excuse to allow events in Tripuri to take their own course.² He wrote to the ruler to implement the promise, failing which Gandhi felt duty-bound to "go on a fast unto death". "If you can't see your way to accepting my suggestion before noon tomorrow," he wrote, "my fast will commence from that time and will continue till after acceptance." The ruler did not respond. Gandhi went on a fast unto death the next day. The decision shook the princes and created a wide stir among the people. The Chief Ministers of Congress provinces urged on the Viceroy to intervene and save the life of Gandhi. The unhappiest man was the Thakur himself, who was but a stooge, without will, initiative, or freedom to act. Three days after the fast commenced the Viceroy intervened, and suggested that the disputed document be referred to Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice of India, for interpretation. Gandhi accepted the offer and broke the fast. The award of Sir Maurice Gwyer upheld the interpretation of Gandhi, and the Thakur was asked to fulfil his promise. This was triumph all along the line! But then came the rub. The genius of Virawala invented a trap. He outwitted Gandhi. Vallabhbhai sent his seven names. These the Thakur was bound to accept. These, Virawala respectfully pointed out, did not include representatives of Bhayats, Gurasdars, the Muslims and the

² "How mysterious are the ways of God" he wrote during the journey (Letter to Mahadev Desai, Feb. 27—Tendulkar, Vol. 5, p. 60). This journey to Rajkot is even a wonder to me. Why I am going? What for? I have thought nothing of these things."

untouchables. Out came Jinnah and Ambedkar with statements condemning the exclusion of Muslims and untouchables. The Bhayats and the Gurasdars held black flag demonstrations. Gandhi agreed to find a formula to provide representation to these interests. But no formula was possible. If he implemented his promise to include these sections, the Thakur could not implement his promise to nominate "only those recommended by Vallabhbhai". Gandhi threw up his hands in despair. He saw the trap, and realized that the cards had been well played by Virawala or maybe by the Resident. He decided to tear up the promise, to tear up the award of the Chief Justice and leave matters in the hands of the Thakur and Durbar Virawala. "I am sorry to confess," he said to fellow workers, "that even after trying for several days to solve the Rajkot tangle, I have failed." He later wrote: "The agonising experiences of those fifteen days have resulted in my making the discovery that my ahimsa should be voted down as a failure." He further wrote, "And so I have left empty-handed, with body shattered, hope cremated."

Subhas Routs the “Old Guard”

A sturdy, dwarf-sized bull, most unlike the Indian species, and two cows, one a like-sized exotic species, and another an indigenous, sturdy product of Haryana, were the special guests at Viceroy's House. Members of the Press and many distinguished persons and their wives had been invited to meet the “honoured guests”. Linlithgow, the successor of Lord Willingdon, was utterly unlike his predecessor. He lacked Willingdon's showmanship. Willingdon was slim, tall, and passably handsome. Linlithgow was long-faced, heavy of jaw, heavy of speech, tall and flabby. He irresistably reminded one of the camel. He was sociable only to the extent necessary to fulfil the obligations of his office. He was completely undemonstrative. He hated Simla because the height made “breathing difficult”. He disliked Delhi because there was no provision for fans or air-conditioners in summer. In Winter, the Viceroy's House, despite heating arrangements, was chilly. He served India because like a true Englishman he had a duty to perform. He hoped to return to Scotland after serving his full term. Actually he stayed longer than any previous Viceroy. He was a Tory by birth and belief. Although at times he displayed liberal instincts, the interests of the Empire were safe in his hands. Lady Linlithgow was tall, sturdy, down to earth, Scottish. She neither shared Lady Willingdon's Parisian flare, nor her irrepressible ardour for social activity. Her greatest love was the Red Cross. She took a keen interest in the care of soldiers—

British or Indian. For her, Delhi, outside the Viceroy's House, remained a strange, unexplored country.

Linlithgow started with a positive plan. He decided to outmanoeuvre Gandhi by setting up committees and commissions, on the lines of the Congress programme, to build up a counter-facade of constructive approach to the solution of India's problems. Congress had set up committees to study labour problems, tenancy legislation, etc. Linlithgow set up a labour commission, an agrarian reform committee, and a planning unit in the Government for the improvement of agriculture. Gandhi had started the basic education scheme. Linlithgow set up a commission on basic and secondary education. Gandhi was experimenting with village industries. Linlithgow set up a committee to help village industries and handicrafts. Gandhi had been preaching the protection of the cow. Linlithgow started "the cult of the Bull", a restoration of the forgotten "Nandi" to its honoured place in the bovine pantheon. The Linlithgow Bull introduced to the Press at Viceroy's House was a specially imported, highly prolific type from Afghanistan for cross-breeding. While Linlithgow fed the exotic bull and its prospective mate, a cattle expert explained the importance of the Bull Cult to India. Cows were sacred, he said, but emphasis must be placed on the quality and capacity of the bulls, for the improvement of the species. The Linlithgow Bull was duly christened after the Viceroy. Princes, Landlords, Members of the Executive Council, high officials, business magnates, later started buying up the best among the breeds, adopting them, and placing their services at the disposal of village communities. The papers were soon full of pictures of the Craik Bull, the Mitter Bull, the Maharaja of Baroda Bull, the Sikandar Hayat Bull, the Patiala Bull, the Bajpai Bull¹ and what not.

It was during the "Bull" era that the Congress met at Hari-pura, a village in Gujarat. Subhas Chandra Bose was elected President. To out-do the "Bull Cult" the Congress President

¹ Names of eminent public figures at the time.

was taken in a traditional chariot, with a team of the most sturdy oxen equal to the number of years the Congress had been in existence. This was the fifty-first session. In this team of fifty-one were commissioned several of the aristocrats of the bovine family, carrying the names of Governors, Commissioners, Maharajas and Loyalists. To further accentuate the bovine atmosphere, more than six hundred cows were imported into Haripura to supply milk to the delegates and the visitors. Vithalnagar, named after Vithalbhai Patel, bore the image of Hollywood in village surroundings. Around improvised huts, bathed in resplendent lights, ran artificial canals. Gandhi's spacious hut was set in a pool of its own. Gandhi was shocked to know that his idea of holding the Congress Session in a village had cost seven and a half lakhs.

Haripura was not merely lights, canals, bulls and cows. Haripura represented one of the most momentous sessions since the suspension of the civil disobedience movement. It represented as much the clash of ideas as the clash of personalities in the Congress. It marked the emergence of Subhas Chandra Bose to top leadership at a time when the Congress was drifting from weakness to weakness. Subhas represented Bengal. He had the blessings of Gandhi but not his confidence. He was too popular and too great a hero in his own right to be opposed by the old guard. Since the Lahore Congress, Subhas had been intermittently in jail, was almost an exile in Europe for five years and a detenu since his return. He had been only recently released, his health shattered, with a suspicion of tuberculosis. Subhas had succeeded Das as Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation and had done remarkably well. He believed in non-violence, but he did not exclude the use of violence. He was a radical and a socialist. He delighted in addressing mass meetings, but more than that he liked big rallies, parades, processions, salutes, with himself standing by as "Commander". Subhas was often suspected by the Government of having a secret hand in the underground activities of Bengali youths. He was supposed to be the brain behind the terrorists. This was partially true. When he was detained in Kurseong, his

brother had arranged to send a few "pills" to improve "your health". Intelligence experts suspected these might be "bullets or bombs". A watch was kept. When the parcel arrived it contained only a dozen *rasogullas*,² a weakness which both brothers shared. The police felt like fools.

Even though Subhas Bose had risen to the most exalted position as a patriot, except for Nehru he had few real friends. Whether it was as a result of growing jealousy between the two, or a sudden realization of honest differences, Subhas soon felt dissatisfied with Nehru's role in the Working Committee. He even began to kick back. His unkindest cut was that Nehru had been behaving like a "stooge" of the "old guard". Subhas wanted a clear showdown with Vallabhbhai and others. Subhas had prepared a master plan which he confidentially unfolded to Nehru, and to some of us. It was his firm view, based on "information I have been getting from Europe", that there would be an international crisis near about the spring of 1939, involving Great Britain in very serious difficulties. It may be even an international war. As a first step Subhas was of the view that a one-year ultimatum should be given to the British Government, either to appoint a Constituent Assembly to draft the constitution of a free India or to be prepared for the resumption of civil disobedience. They should jointly persuade Gandhi to prepare the ground for this resumption, and take charge of the operations. Meanwhile, from among the radical elements, youth leagues, kisan and mazdoor sabhas, etc., daring young men should be secretly recruited for acts of planned sabotage, to paralyze communications, by cutting off telephone and telegraph wires, tearing up railway lines and blowing up bridges. Intense secret propaganda should be carried on in the rank and file of the Army, and from among possible insurgents, a guerrilla force should be created to act at the appropriate time with the aid of "friendly" foreign powers at war with the British.

Subhash felt certain that Germany and Italy would act

² Indian sweets.

together against England and France: Russia and the United States preferring to stay neutral. He was also certain that, when the time came, Russia would join Hitler, and not Britain and France, out of fear if not out of any common ideology. If America got embroiled in Europe, Subhash felt certain that Japan would strike in the Pacific as an ally of Germany and Italy. India thus would have allies both in the East and in the West. Nehru was not so certain about future international developments. He, however, emotionally recoiled at the very idea of planning even hypothetically any kind of unholy alliance with Germany, Italy or Japan. He was definite that Russia would remain neutral. In such an emergency, he thought, India would be fully justified in refusing to take sides, or allow its forces and resources to be used, unless she was in a position to decide her course of action as a free country. Nehru also felt certain that Gandhi would never consent to any secret plans involving acts of violence. In any case, both in respect of giving any ultimatum and of reviving civil disobedience, Gandhi would like to remain the supreme judge as to the opportune time, and the sole dictator as to the programme to be followed. From then onwards Nehru felt that he and Subhas had irreconcilable international outlooks.

When the time approached for the next session of the Congress, Subhas, even though still ailing and weak, decided to hit out on his own, hoping that he would still have Nehru's goodwill. The final choice of the Congress President was as usual left by the old guard to Mahatma Gandhi even though he was not a four-anna member of the Congress. In the past any nominee of Gandhi had been invariably elected unanimously. For the coming Tripuri Session of the Congress, Gandhi recommended the election of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, partly as a gesture to the Muslims and partly in recognition of the great services of the Maulana to the national cause. The supporters of Subhas put up his name, obviously with his consent, for a second term. The old guard expected that in due course Subhas would gracefully withdraw from the contest after knowing Gandhi's wishes. Subhas did not. The Maulana

seeing the danger of pitting himself against Subhas, at that time one of the most popular leaders after Gandhi and Nehru, got cold feet. He withdrew his candidature. At the last moment the old guard spitefully put up as its candidate Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a loyal party supporter, but comparatively an obscure opponent. Pattabhi was badly defeated. The old guard was furious. Such rebellion had never been known to the Congress hierarchy. Subhas and the old guard came into open conflict. Having suffered a rebuff by the withdrawal of his candidate Azad, Gandhiji allowed events to take their own ugly turn. Both sides came to a head-on collision at Tripuri. Special trains loaded with real and bogus delegates were rushed to Tripuri, Bengal unitedly spearheading support for Subhas, and the Central Provinces and Punjab, etc. lending conspicuous support to the old guard. Fate was unkind to Subhas. He developed high fever and intestinal trouble on the eve of the session. He had to be borne to the *pandal* on a stretcher. Opponents uncharitably suggested that the illness was a fake and a ruse to create a stalemate in the Session. Even a special doctor was sent to verify the nature of the illness. His portrait had to substitute for him in the presidential procession of fifty-two elephants.

Thirteen members of the Working Committee resigned, including Nehru, leaving Subhas only with one member, his brother Sarat. On behalf of the old guard Govind Ballabh Pant moved a resolution in the AICC, which in effect expressed lack of confidence in the President. This was ruled out of order. It was the only meeting the President attended. In the subjects Committee and the open session, supporters of one section flung shoes, abuses, and cat calls at the speakers of the opposite section. Feelings ran high. Rowdy scenes were witnessed. Confusion followed. The only important resolution which emerged was a demand for the summoning of a Constituent Assembly. Subhas remained ill for a few weeks. The Congress remained without a Working Committee. Meanwhile, he tried hard to win the support of Gandhi to appoint a generally acceptable personnel for the Working Committee. Finally he

decided to resign. He summoned a meeting of the AICC in Calcutta, before which he submitted his resignation.

I had gone to Calcutta for the session. Rajen Babu was elected President for the rest of the term. But before the meeting dispersed the infuriated Bengali youths made a mad rush at the leaders, sparing only Nehru. A shower of shoes, chappals, potatoes, brinjals and stones fell on the dais. In the pandemonium Kripalani fell down, Govind Ballabh Pant escaped with a torn dhoti and ripped shirt, Rajendra Prasad lost his cap and his shoes and many others, the bigger and the lesser fry, were mauled, mobbed and beaten up in the melée! I just escaped unhurt with the help of Subhas.

The struggle had become private as well as public on both sides. The old guard was opposed to the aggressive views of Subhas and jealous of his increasing popularity. Subhas started the Forward Bloc, an ostensibly progressive and aggressive group within the Congress. He went on a tour of Bengal, Bihar and South India. The people gave him a hero's reception. Thousands lined the route of his processions. Many thousands attended the meetings. He called the old guard reactionary, Congress Ministers corrupt, and severely criticised the decisions of the AICC.

A mock inquisition was held. What Subhas claimed "as a right", namely to criticise wrong policies and decisions, was taken as the best evidence of "indiscipline". A man who, next to Gandhi and Nehru, was then the bravest, the boldest and the most honest as a patriot in the country, who had suffered and sacrificed as few others had done, was declared "unfit for holding any office in the Congress for three years". He was virtually bulldozed out of the organization. It was a farcical inquisition, a mean vendetta, and a blatant crime, which neither morality could justify, nor decency condone. Gandhi neither commended it nor condoned it. He just kept conveniently aloof.

18

And Then the War !

I was on my way to Calcutta. I had a "reserved" lower berth in a four-berth first class compartment. The opposite berth was occupied by Sir Ziauddin Ahmed, the Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, a member of the Muslim League, a Cambridge wrangler, with an outstanding record in mathematics. He was a "dependable" member of the Legislative Assembly.

By evening the train steamed into Allahabad. Judging from the number of people on the platform, it would appear as if the Kumbh mela¹ had just dispersed. Out of the jostling crowd emerged a familiar Gandhi cap, and the sound of a distressed voice calling my name. It was Upadhyaya, the faithful secretary of the Nehrus. "Can you find some room for Panditji? He has to go to Calcutta?" "He is most welcome. Where is he?" I said, looking despairingly at the crowd around me. Nehru still kept to the Gandhian craze of travelling third class. But rarely was suitable accommodation available except by previous arrangement in third or even second class. Gandhi was different. As a volunteer, I had travelled quite a few times with Gandhiji in third class. People often left a whole compartment free to him and his entourage. Whenever I travelled third class independently, I realized the difference. Often even while standing it was a relief if one could get near a window and breathe! On this occasion Nehru had tried all the classes and

¹ A big Hindu religious festival.

all the compartments, but found that even access was impossible, leave aside a seat. As soon as Nehru entered, almost all the "transients" left. His third class ticket had to be changed to first class. "What a waste of money," he remarked. "How can any worker travel these days?" Then, turning to me: "I can sleep on the floor, so long as nobody objects to my adding to the congestion." He did not realize the magic that was Nehru, or if he realized, he was only apologising for the discomfort he may cause. The occupant of an upper berth soon rolled up his bedding and left, saying, "Panditji, you can use my berth. I can catch the next train. I have not far to go." Before I could reach my bedroll to put it on the upper berth, Nehru had already spread his, saying with a smile, "You are too fat to climb to the upper berth. Besides, I would be scared all night thinking what would happen if you rolled off by chance!" That was his way of doing a kindness.

"Have you ordered dinner?" he said. "I intend going to the dining car at the next station. If you will join, I will order for two," I observed. "Cancel it," he said peremptorily. "I have enough for two in that basket there. Besides, it is good, clean, home stuff." It was a fairly large basket. The prospect was tempting. I looked forward to a real "Kashmiri" meal: rice, curry, puris, spicy kababs, with a few odd delicacies thrown in. I cancelled my order. As Nehru went in for a wash, Ziauddin asked me to introduce him to the "great leader". I would have preferred to avoid this delicate task. I knew Nehru's deep aversion for "Communalists and loyalists". Ziauddin was both to the "nth" degree. I, however, did the introduction with much formality and pretended politeness. When I came out later after my wash, surprisingly enough I found both engaged in lively, cordial conversation. This was intriguing.

Soon, with the deftness of an expert butler, Nehru started laying plates, napkins, knives and forks. He took out the tumblers and began cleaning them as if he were preparing for a surgical operation. He would permit no help. Meanwhile my appetite was on edge. Soon came the partizan shot! "Incidentally, I am a vegetarian these days. But we have some

boiled eggs," he said still engaged with the tumblers. Kashmiri vegetarian cooking was famous, and it little mattered, I felt, if there was any meat or not. He slowly brought out boiled eggs, boiled potatoes, a cut cucumber, fresh tomatoes, two large carrots and a bowl of shredded cabbage in vinegar. "There you are, with slices of bread and *papad*." The basket had nearly touched the bottom. He saw the despair on my face. "I assure you it is good, healthy food," he said. "I have also some bananas and dates for dessert." Meanwhile, Ziauddin approached Nehru very hesitantly, and asked if he could be "given the privilege of sharing food" with us. Nehru cordially invited him even though he realized that the austerity dinner before us was not enough for three. He had misunderstood. Ziauddin had his own large basket which he wanted to share. I was surprised when Nehru, who earlier announced himself a "vegetarian", took the curry *pullao* and *kababs* of Ziauddin. I could not attribute this sudden change-over to his appetite. He explained later. "With me vegetarian food is a dietary preference, not a matter of religion or faith. Having first misunderstood the doctor's request, I felt, he would be terribly hurt if I did not share his food when he put it before us." "But why this cordiality?" I interposed. "You know he is a communalist and a lousy loyalist," I said, "although as a person he is extraordinarily agreeable and pleasant." "You forget", said Nehru, rather abruptly, "he is also one of the most distinguished Indian scholars, the best stuff that Cambridge has produced. He is a man of whom any country could be proud. In a free India he would be a great citizen. The curse of political domination is, it makes our best brains cheap job hunters and office seekers." This was another aspect of Nehru. He had no narrow prejudices.

Nehru read till late in the night. As a relaxation he liked reading science fiction and detective stories, a habit from jail life. "Nobody objects to these and the Bible!" he remarked. He was loaded with some of the latest books on physics, politics, history and international affairs. He read many books at the same time, not one book at one time. From Europe he

had brought some of the latest foreign magazines. Very early in the morning when I opened my eyes I saw Nehru at the edge of my seat looking out of the open window into the distance, almost oblivious of his surroundings, lost in his own thoughts and in the fast-moving panorama of the countryside. Nehru was a notorious hustler, a man of action, who wanted to do things, or to get things done quickly. But at the same time Nehru lived for a great part in himself—aloof, immersed in his thoughts, dreaming his own strange dreams, building a new world in his imagination, fighting imaginary battles to destroy the ugliness of tyranny and injustice around him. I watched him for a long time pretending to be asleep. As the train slowed down, he suddenly became aware of his surroundings. Addressing me, he said, "Now get ready. I have ordered tea at the next stop. I do not know where we are. But we are running late by four hours."

As we were going to Calcutta, the conversation naturally turned to Subhas, who he knew was a great friend of mine and of whom I knew he was once very fond despite recent occurrences. "Why did the Congress have to drive such a fearless, devoted, honest patriot into the wilderness?" I asked. "As a matter of fact he is one of my chief worries, just now," he said. "If he had less conceit and more sense of accommodation, one could do something to salvage the situation. I myself do not agree with the old guard. But I do not approve some of his ways and plans either." "Is it the conceit of Subhas, or the dictatorial arrogance of Sardar Patel—or both—that have caused the split?" I asked. "If Subhash had not opposed Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, or if he had not defeated him, would he have been made an outcaste?" "It is not so bad as that", Panditji argued, "but it is true that on both sides a great deal of the personal factor has entered into the controversy. A lot of bitterness has resulted at a time when we should have all pulled together. The idea of Subhash that India should exploit the coming crisis, and join hands with Britain's future enemies to destroy British imperialism, apart from being fantastic, has an element of opportunism, utterly distasteful to some of us."

The idea, I informed him, was not very fantastic. Subhash had already built up international connections. I told him of a recent visit of one Baron Von Studnitz, a top Hitlerite, head of a powerful newspaper syndicate in Germany. The Baron had met me and evidently some other editors. He had pleaded that Hitler was a friend of India, that Germany would help India gain her independence, and some of the German companies in India would be willing to offer financial aid to papers who published the "truth" about Germany. One of the top leaders of the Forward Bloc, the head of an insurance company in Delhi,² had been to Japan. He had been freely suggesting that at the "proper time" Japan would help India, and that even then funds were available for such papers as would stop painting China a martyr of Japanese aggression and present Japan as a friend of the Indian people. Just as there was serious danger that some of the Communists may blindly support whatever position Russia may take up in the war, there was the danger that some others may seriously embroil themselves in support of the axis powers, through these so-called friends, in the hope that this may bring independence nearer. It may be part of a plan, or a desperate move, but it was not altogether "fantastic".

"I am glad you have told me all this", said Nehru. "I had heard some similar rumours, but did not credit them. At this time we have to be firm, determined and clear-cut about our policy. Whatever happens we can never join hands with Hitler and Mussolini."

At Calcutta I went with Nehru to call on Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. He could move only in a wheel chair. But he liked to move in the corridors of the large house in which he was then staying at Barrackpore. Age had marked deep furrows on the benign face. But it was still a face one could associate with the masterpieces of Michael Angelo or Leonardo da Vinci—long silvery locks falling across the shoulder; the beard of a sage; deep, dreamy eyes, and yet so

² Lala Shankar Lall.

alert as to move with every gesture, every thought. How unlike he was from Gandhi, or, for that matter, any of his contemporaries. He could belong to any country, any age! He was wisdom incarnate! He spoke softly, in well-modulated accents, with carefully chosen pauses. After Nehru and the poet emerged from their private *tete-à-tete*, Tagore wished us all, and remarked that nothing cheered him more than prowling on his wheel chair in the corridors, looking at the trees and the flowers. "If only man could take his lessons from nature!" he observed. Then, bending towards a plant, he plucked a flower and handed it to Nehru. Nehru was dressed in a *dhoti* and a long loose shirt. "Wear it", said the poet. "But, Gurudev, a flower and a *kurta* hardly go well together," Nehru demurred. "The simpler the dress the more beautiful must a flower look. See how the fisher women adorn themselves with flowers. For them the *champak* and the *jasmine* are like diamonds and pearls." And then the poet became suddenly grave. After a pause, he remarked, "If only the nations of the world could adjust themselves like a composite flower...." Here Nehru repeated, after a pause, "... if only!" I interrupted by making a brief reference to the concept of a confederate union in Asia. Tagore smiled. "It would be something after my heart," he said. And then, addressing Nehru, he said, as if making a request: "It is not of Asia alone that you should think. Keep also in mind Africa. Asia and Africa should march hand in hand. There can be no freedom for Asia unless there is also freedom for Africa." Two years later the poet died. Nehru and Subhash went their separate ways. Both had misjudged the future. The war they feared came sooner than they had expected. In a formal statement on the 1st of September, 1939, Lord Linlithgow announced that "India was at war with the axis powers".

19

Jinnah Explodes a Bomb

During the first phase of the war, up to Dunkirk, it seemed as if the Civil Service was more concerned with fighting the "battle of India", rather than winning the battle of Britain. By a special ordinance the Press was gagged, and in addition all war news was subjected to stringent censorship. Our ability as Editors to publish as much of the truth as possible, and yet avoid heavy penalties, was a continuous rope-dancing trick. It was not surprising that some of us broke down under the nervous strain. Even though the Congress had put forward no active programme of opposition, young aggressive workers of the Congress were picked up for all sorts of petty offences and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Subhash Bose was one of the conspicuous ones to be arrested, along with Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Deva, etc. Subhash was interned in his house. A heavy guard of security police was posted around the premises to prevent his communicating with anyone outside. His mother and a servant were the only inmates. The health of Subhash had again broken down as a result of ill treatment in prison, and his hunger strikes in protest. Mentally he had reached the limit of frustration. He had been expelled from the Congress for "indiscipline", when his offence was only that he wanted the Congress to give an ultimatum to the British, and make a bold bid for freedom. Subhash felt that even if later the Congress felt compelled by circumstances to accept his programme, he would not find the personal atmosphere congenial for rendering any active service.

And yet he also felt that at that critical hour, when destiny was writing a new chapter in world history, he could not stay still, mark time, and watch events from the window of an internee.

Devoutly religious as he was, it was in this mood that Subhash took to a spell of meditation and prolonged prayer. Not even his mother was permitted to disturb. After several days Subhash accidentally looked into the mirror. For a moment he himself could not identify the long-haired, flat-bearded, mongolian eyed apparition reflected in the mirror. It seemed to him as if his prayers had been heard. One evening, dressed only in a *lungi*¹, he walked out of the house, unnoticed by the security guards. From his brother's place he changed into clothes appropriate to a northern Indian moslem. In stages, under assumed names, and by different subterfuges, he reached Afghanistan. From Afghanistan he reached Germany via Moscow. From the Berlin Radio he addressed his compatriots in India. He announced that it was his intention to raise an army of Indians outside India, to liberate his motherland. He called upon his countrymen to help this army of liberation when the appropriate time came. It was a solemn dramatic appeal which had a tremendous effect on the people.

Other leaders were seriously divided on such polemical issues as to whether their participation in the war should be non-violent and moral, or violent but defensive. Whether, if imperialism was bad, Nazism and totalitarianism were worse. The common people, however, were more concerned about the overthrow of the British, and it was exciting and exhilarating for them to feel that a trusted patriot and a great hero was planning to return to India at the head of an Indian army of liberation. Subhash in exile became an even greater hero in the eyes of the people than Subhash in prison. All sorts of legends began to grow around him.

As the war led from one catastrophe to another, Nehru felt more and more bewildered and confused, but all the time

¹ A wrap around the legs used by Moslems.

impatient for action : to do something dramatic and spectacular not only to advance the cause of freedom, but also to enable India to play an important role in shaping world events. By 1941, Russia had been invaded by Germany. Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. The United States entered the war. American forces arrived in India, to help the Chinese and to build up resistance against the Japanese. The Japanese, in a quick, dramatic sweep, captured Indo-China, Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaya. They even threatened the eastern border of India.

Gandhi found in the war both a challenge to his doctrine of nonviolence and a test. During an interview with Linlithgow he broke down in tears at the ghastly prospect of London being bombed, and such landmarks as Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral being destroyed. When France collapsed he was overwhelmed. Reports of every act of carnage distressed him profoundly. But his advice to his own people, to the people of England and even to the people of Germany was the same. "Resort to the weapon of nonviolence. Discard violence. Violence will destroy the victor and the vanquished alike." He invited Hitler in a letter which was neither published nor despatched by the British censor, to desist from the mad course of violence and destruction. Even if he conquered the world, what would he gain if in the process he and Germany lost their soul. He also addressed an open letter to the people of England, which, however, was widely published only to expose him to the censure and the ridicule of critics abroad. He appealed to the British to lay down arms and resort to nonviolent resistance. "Your soldiers are doing the same work of destruction as the Germans," he wrote. "The only difference is that perhaps yours are not as thorough as those of the Germans."

Initially his advice to the Congress was not to embarrass Britain at this juncture. He even suggested that Congress Ministries may be allowed to function in the provinces, and that Congress should offer its moral support to Britain, but not actively participate in the war effort. Up to a point his

Congress colleagues were with Gandhi. They could not, however, go along with him, so far as nonviolence in defence or resistance to Fascist aggression were concerned. Nehru and his supporters took a more realistic view and broke away from Gandhi on this vital point. They declared that if England agreed to introduce such changes in the government structure which would enable Indians to direct their own destiny and organise their own defence as free people, they would support the war effort, and undertake to mobilise all the nation's resources for self-defence and to winning the war. The only response from Britain to the Congress offer were a few admonitory speeches by Amery, the Secretary of State, and a half-hearted statement by the Viceroy that Dominion Status for India still remained the objective of Britain after the war.

The Congress withdrew the offer of cooperation, and called upon all Congress Ministries to resign. At the Ramgarh Congress held under the Presidentship of Maulana Azad, Gandhi again became dictator. He was given a free hand to lay down the programme of action. The first thing needed according to Gandhi was a moral clean-up. He asked Congress Committees to select men and women capable of offering *satyagraha* if the call came. They should be "willing and able to suffer imprisonment", and to lose their all if heavy fines or other penalties were levied. A large number of power-hunters and job-seekers left the Congress. The Congress which had become almost an election fighting organization, seething with corruption, suddenly came back to life. The younger workers, among the common people, rallied to Gandhi's call. The elders prepared themselves for a fight. Thousands of women volunteered for arrest.

When Jinnah was a schoolboy in Karachi, he often passed by a soothsayer on his way to school. The astrologer one day insisted on seeing his hand. He told him that he would rise to a position of great influence and power by the time he was sixty-five, and later in life he was destined to become a "king."² Jinnah entered the 65th year of his life on the "significant"

² Hector Boetho, *Jinnah*, p. 6.

date of December 25, 1940. Incidentally his date of birth, like many other things about Jinnah, seemed to have also been chosen by Jinnah. In the register of his school in Karachi the date recorded is October 20, 1875.³ Jinnah evidently did not react favourably to this nondescript date or the year. He later shifted the official date to December 25, 1876, probably after the adage: "Some people are born great, and some people chose the right date to be born great."

Jinnah was born in the house of a hide merchant, Jinnah Poonya. After matriculation, Jinnah went to London, joined Lincoln's Inn, worked hard, and at the age of twenty became a barrister. At twenty-three he was practising at the High Court Bar. Jinnah's first wife had died earlier. Jinnah married a second time rather late in life. He was thirty-seven when he fell in love with a Parsi girl of seventeen, the daughter of a multi-millionaire of Bombay, Sir Dinshaw Petit. The parents objected. But when Ruttie Petit was eighteen, she married Jinnah secretly. She soon became one of the social celebrities in Bombay, Delhi and Simla. She had an abundant sense of humour, a flare for good clothes, a passion for fun, dance and music, and was the only one who could deflate Jinnah's pomposity. Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to bring him down to earth. As a memory of their marriage, she left him a daughter, who also left her father and sought refuge with her grand parents.

Jinnah had a standing grievance against his forefathers for adopting the family name "Jinnah", meaning "short". Jinnah was tall, slim to the point of being bony, with a tailored handsomeness enhanced by the sabre-point crease of his trousers, and the tidy effect conveyed by his hair carefully plastered back into an unchanging position. He dressed in meticulous European style, wore a hard collar to give an extra lift to the neck line, so that the chin could assume a pose of natural arrogance. He had small, deep-set, peering eyes, a sharp, conspicuous nose, and large thin lips embedded in natural wrinkles

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

which converted a smile into a grin, and a laugh into a whimper. He did smile and did laugh occasionally, but never at his own expense. Even in company he gave the impression of being aloof.

He was as much a Muslim as Nehru was a Hindu.⁴ Like Nehru he felt a lot in common with the West, a stranger among his own people, and a misfit in both places. He hated dirt of any kind and even refused to shake hands unless he was sure that the other's were clean. Once Gandhi was presiding over a public meeting in Gujarat. This was when Gandhi was only an initiate immigrant and Jinnah was a name in Indian politics to conjure with. Jinnah was to be the chief speaker. Gandhi invited him to sit down next to him on a platform without chairs. Jinnah reluctantly sat down hanging his legs down the edge of the platform. When Jinnah started speaking, Gandhi interrupted and requested that the audience being mainly uneducated, Jinnah might speak to them in Gujarati. Jinnah had never employed Gujarati even to speak to his dog. He considered this a rude request and an unkind cut. He never liked Gandhi afterwards till the day of his death.

Jinnah had hitherto continued to live in an old Goanese style bungalow on Mount Pleasant Road, which reminded him of his early bachelor days and also of his later tragic married life. For him it had become a sort of "ghost house". On his sixty-fifth birthday he moved into a new house built by him in the same neighbourhood—a palatial greystone structure, with wide crescent-arched verandahs, spacious balconies, large high-roofed rooms, a marble portico, reached through a long driveway, with a marble terrace overlooking a large well-laid garden in the rear. His instructions to the Italian architect, who built 1, Mount Pleasant Road, were "a big reception room, a big verandah, and big lawns for garden parties". In New Delhi, at the same time, Jinnah acquired one of the most outstanding

⁴ Jinnah and Sapru were once appearing in a Court in Hyderabad. A point of Muslim Law was involved. Jinnah was ignorant of Arabic. Sapru translated *The Quran* for him. Headlines in the papers next day said, "Maulana Sapru translates Quran for Pandit Jinnah!"

private residential buildings, custom-built by Walter George, a noted architect. Built in an unusual colonial-cum-Italian style, its French windows were in striking colours. It had a four-acre garden. Ironically enough it was located on Aurangzeb Road—named after the great Moghul Emperor who shook the foundations of the Moghul Empire trying to increase Muslim converts at the point of the sword!

On his sixty-fifth birthday, one of Jinnah's petulant admirers observed a long streak of gray hair, breaking at the top of the forehead into a two-tone patch. Jinnah remarked, "But I have never felt so fighting fit." Jinnah had hitherto been known as "Mr Jinnah". Gandhi was universally called "Mahatma", the "great spirit", Patel, "Sardar" (the commander), Subhash, "Netaji" (the supreme leader). Even Abdul Ghaffar Khan was called "Badshah Khan". In the League there were either Knights, or Khan Bahadurs. It was time Jinnah gave a title to himself. It all started with Gandhi. In one of his letters Gandhi addressed him in a rather sophisticated Indian style "Janab Jinnah Sahib" and not just "Mr Jinnah". To Jinnah it seemed rather a joke, like addressing him as "Mr Jinnah Esquire". If it had to be something Indian, it should have been well chosen. To flatter him Gandhi addressed "Dear Qaid-i-Azam". Jinnah did not object. He was thus henceforth known as "Qaid-e-Azam" (supreme law-giver, or commander).

At this very time Jinnah, with the astuteness of a career-seeking opportunist, took his great political somersault. It was well-timed, well-planned, and as a checkmating device a master move. In an article in *Time and Tide* (March 9, 1940), he wrote: "A constitution must be evolved that recognizes that there are in India two nations, who must both share governance of their common motherland." A few months later when he found gathering response to his tune from British officials and some Muslims, he even omitted a reference to "their common motherland", and called for a division of India on the basis of his "two nation" theory. Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders dismissed the very concept of Hindus and Muslims being two nations as fantastic nonsense. "Those whom God had made

one," said Gandhi, "man will never be able to divide." No responsible British Statesman in England or India then seriously or genuinely subscribed to the theory or believed at the time that the division of India was desirable. But in the very impossibility of the demand reactionary British officials saw its vital appeal.

If Jinnah got enough supporters, and stood firmly by his demand, the Government could always plead that, even though willing to consider favourably the Congress proposals, it could make no advance without a previous settlement between the Congress and the League. It was in this pampered mood that Jinnah arrived in Simla to meet the Viceroy.⁵ Gandhi was there. Someone suggested to Jinnah that it might be desirable if he and Gandhi could meet before meeting the Viceroy. Jinnah agreed, but added, "I am willing to see him if he wishes, but I am not willing that you should say that I wish to see him." Gandhi, when approached, replied, "If I were to say that I wish to see Jinnah, it would be a lie. But if Jinnah wishes to meet me I will walk barefoot from here to Cecil Hotel." They did not meet. Jinnah obtained from the Viceroy a pledge in writing that His Majesty's Government "could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government". To complete the blockade, Jinnah went further. Through the Nawab of Bhopal, the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, and through influential officials he got the princes to agree that in case of any constitutional settlement "they will not stab the League in the back", and in return the princes will have the support of Jinnah and the League.

Lord Linlithgow finally moved. The Viceroy decided on his own to "enlarge the Executive Council", raising the number of members from seven to twelve and increasing Indian mem-

⁵ The Viceroy had called a Conference at Simla of Party leaders on August 9, 1940 to which Jinnah and Gandhi were invited.

bers, who were to be outside the fold of the Congress or the League, from three to eight.

Gandhi now felt that, unless the Congress expressed its resentment against the contemptuous manner in which its demands were being treated, "it would be strangled to death". He searched his armoury of *satyagraha* for some weapon. The Congress Ministries now had long been out of office. The Congress Committees had been working as *satyagraha* committees, screening tested *satyagrahis*, and weeding out the chaff. Finally the inspiration came. Gandhi unfolded his plan of "individual civil disobedience" to the Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha. He selected one of his earliest associates, Vinoba Bhave, to offer individual civil disobedience in vindication of the right of freedom of expression.

Vinoba Bhave's was a queer name. No one had hitherto known him outside the inmates of Gandhi's *ashram*. Gandhi had been known to produce heroes "out of clay". But Vinoba was no clay. He was his most trusted disciple in the art of *satyagraha*. As an undergraduate he had joined Gandhi, renouncing all his worldly possessions. By devoted study he became a Sanskrit and Arabic scholar and also mastered the arts of "spinning, weaving, cooking and scavenging". On October 17, the goatie-bearded Vinoba started from village to village making speeches against participation in the war. He was arrested on the 21st and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

Nehru was chosen to follow Vinoba on November 7. Before Nehru could offer *satyagraha*, the Government arrested him for some speeches he had made in the villages of his home province. The battle of India, the bureaucrats felt, had been joined. The battle of Britain was the concern of the Home Government. By mid-summer over 20,000 men and women had been convicted and nearly 14,000 were in jail. Gandhi could have filled up Indian prisons with a hundred thousand more men and women, if he so desired. But Gandhi saw that Britain's troubles, far from being over, were increasing every day. He therefore decided to go slow.

20

A Game of Chess

In December, 1941, compelled more by adversity than out of any sense of chivalry, Linlithgow reciprocated Gandhi's previous year's Christmas gesture and released Azad, the Congress President, and Jawaharlal Nehru.¹ This was prefaced by a laconic *communiqué* which merely said that "the Government of India, confident in the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war effort until victory is secured, have reached the conclusion that the civil disobedience prisoners whose offences have been formal or symbolic in character can be set free". Following this, thousands of *satyagrahis* were simultaneously released from prison all over India. Gandhi did not anticipate this general amnesty at this time. Nor had he provided for such a contingency. Amery² at this time had arrogantly hoped "that the isolation of jail life will enable Congress leaders to reflect and regret." Gandhi described his statement as "sprinkling chillies on a festering sore". In one of his challenging moods, Gandhi declared that if the Government expect by these releases "that prisoners will have a change of opinions in their self-invited solitude, I am hoping that the Government will be soon disillusioned". A few weeks later it was Gandni who felt disillusioned!

Congress leaders, including Azad and Nehru, did have fresh thoughts in the solitude of their prison cells. They had reacted

¹The previous year Gandhi called off his individual disobedience during Christmas.

²The reactionary Secretary of State for India.

differently from Gandhi to the lightning events that had taken place during their incarceration. For Gandhi war was a challenge to his creed of nonviolence. Nehru saw in Indian freedom a great determining factor for the course of future history. He was profoundly interested in the preservation of Russia and the survival of China. Even if India could not help the Russians and the Chinese at present, should India add to the embarrassments of the United Nations? This was the question Nehru felt he and Congressmen had to answer. Even more vital than these developments was the danger of a likely invasion of India by Japan. This invasion had become an imminent reality. Other Congress leaders had come out of prison too tired to seek a fresh sentence. They hoped that the Congress could be persuaded to accept office, even if it were necessary to leave to Britain and the allies the general guidance and control of war operations in India. Rajagopalachari was conspicuous in that category. On one basic point those who supported Nehru and those who backed Rajagopalachari were agreed: namely, that individual civil disobedience should be abandoned. At Gandhi's request a meeting of the AICC was summoned. He hoped that the AICC would endorse his decision to carry on the struggle, and take up the "challenge of Amery and the Government". The Working Committee met³ at Bardoli, where Gandhi was then recouping, and the AICC met later at Wardha also to suit the convenience of Gandhi. After prolonged discussions, spread over several days to Gandhi's chagrin, the Working Committee and the AICC both adopted a resolution, mainly drafted by Nehru and supported by Rajagopalachari, which renewed the old offer of the Congress to participate actively in the war effort, if effective power was transferred to Indian hands. Meantime, as a "sop" to Gandhi, his dictatorship was maintained. Gandhi saw through the "sop". He wrote to Azad, the then President, wanting to be relieved of the responsibility of leading the campaign any further.⁴ Defining his own doctrinaire position, he said he now wanted

³On the 23rd of December, 1941.

⁴Tendulkar, *Mahatma Gandhi*, January 5, 1942, Vol. VI, p. 43.

the support of only those "who are sure in their heart of hearts, that prudence, political insight, policy, every consideration demands that *ahimsa* may not be sacrificed for 'Swaraj'." To many it seemed at the time that for Gandhi *ahimsa* had become more important than "Swaraj".

Rajagopalachari carried rebellion a step further. He called a meeting of the Congress members of the Madras Legislature, which passed a resolution demanding, as an immediate measure, a National Coalition Government at the Centre, with popular governments in the Provinces, supported by a declaration of Indian freedom after the war. He further declared that, if his demand was accepted, "my conception of nonviolence would not prohibit even an old man like myself from responding to the appeal for joining the colours in defence of my land and its freedom." Whether he had any secret hope or not, uncharitable critics did suggest that the stock of Rajagopalachari with the British at this time was so high that, if an eventuality arose and the Viceroy had any say, Rajaji could have easily got the Prime Ministership in a coalition government. Rumours spread of serious differences between Gandhi, Nehru and Rajagopalachari. Gandhi, though disappointed in both, affirmed his faith in Nehru rejecting the proposal of Rajagopalachari. His shrewd, experienced mind saw that whatever Britain's distress, it would not accept the demands of Nehru but there was a chance of Rajaji's offer being accepted. Rajaji's offer would not bring India the power to mobilise its own defence, but would involve India in the war. This Gandhi wanted to avoid at all costs. Whatever may have been the extent of Gandhi's pessimism he was unduly confident that the British would accept the Congress demand and will have to bow to the compulsion of events that were taking place in the East and the West.

By early March Burma was occupied. Rangoon fell into Japanese hands. As many British and Australian soldiers as could be evacuated by sea were shipped off. Those who could not be sent by sea were escorted under air protection by the "Burma Road", a route reserved for "Europeans only". Even local Europeans and Anglo-Burmese, men and women, were

assured this safe route of escape to India. Indian soldiers were left behind, to surrender or to fend their way through thick jungles and rugged mountains, without food or water. More than a million Indian citizens were made to evacuate, and to seek a journey home with their children and even babies in arms, through thick unexplored jungle country. An incident which shocked India occurred when the Japanese were advancing across the Sittang river. Three Indian brigades were stationed on the "do or die" mission of holding the bridge against Japanese advance. When resistance became risky the British and Dominion soldiers were ordered to retreat. After "all of them" had safely crossed, the bridge was blown up, leaving the brave Indian fighters either to take the risk of swimming back or to surrender to the Japanese.

There was complete censorship at the time, but these stories, sometimes highly exaggerated, were broadcast to India through the axis radios, from Saigon, Berlin or Rome. They soon became current all over the country. Churchill mentioned this particular incident rather callously. "After a fortnight of fighting against superior and growing Japanese forces the three British Indian brigades who formed the 17th Division were all forced to the line of the river Salwaan. Here a fierce battle was fought but it became obvious that a further retreat to the river Sittang was imperative. Over the swift-flowing river, five hundred yards wide, there was only one bridge. Under the impression that our three returning brigades were greatly weakened, scattered and beaten, and in fact trapped, the order was given by the Commander of the brigade, with the permission of the divisional commander, to blow up the bridge. When the division successfully fought its way back to the river bank it found the bridge destroyed and the broad flood before it. This was a major disaster."⁵

At the same time temporarily deprived of American supplies and with British forces collapsing like nine-pins in neighbouring South-East Asia, Chinese anxieties increased. Chiang

⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. IV, pp. 135-36.

Kai-Shek and Madame Chiang, with Roosevelt's consent, flew to India to hold consultations "with the Viceroy, the Military Commanders and Indian political leaders".

One could see from the start that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, so far as the Viceroy was concerned, was an unwelcome guest—a sort of nuisance that had to be tolerated. Even a junior Maharaja received greater courtesy at the Viceroy's House than was extended to the Chinese dictator. The General and Madame Chiang were housed not in the main Viceregal lodge but in a secretary's quarters in the Viceregal Estate. It was explained that the Generalissimo and his wife wanted to be left "free" to meet anyone they liked. As one very, very British Aide remarked: "They could use their own garlic and their spices to their hearts' content." Lord Linlithgow arranged a formal banquet in their honour but scarcely took much notice of their existence. In fact the manner in which Nehru had free access to them during their period of stay, it seemed as if Nehru and not the Viceroy was the host.

Chiang Kai-Shek, slim, tall and affable, created a favourable impression on the Indian people. Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, spruce, vibrant and attractive made a great personal hit. Wagging official tongues even suggested that she had become terribly fond of Nehru or vice-versa. The Congress High Command had at the time a lot of widowers and bachelors. Yet both admirers, and those otherwise disposed, associated Nehru more than any one else with romance, because he was handsome, attractive and ingratiating. In spreading the rumour "wagging tongues" saw a double advantage: hitting an unwelcome guest and a rebellious patriot with one stone. In fact, at this very time, paid muck-rakers and paid penpushers of the heavily subsidised "War Front" had been engaged in spreading noxious stories even about Gandhi. Unlike Nehru, who just laughed at gossipy stories about himself, Gandhi felt deeply hurt at such malevolent propaganda. "My *brahmacharya*", he wrote, "is said to be a cloak to hide my sensuality. I took the vow of *brahmacharya* in 1906 and that for the better service of the country." Since then he explained he looked

upon woman "as the mother of man", and while women disciples had massaged him, had freely slept around him in the *ashram*, had worked with him, they had "felt safe with me in every respect". He said more in anger than in defence, "if I were sexually attracted by women, I have courage enough even at this time of life to become a polygamist."

During the brief visit of the Generalissimo a crisis arose. Chiang Kai-Shek and his wife intimated to the Viceroy that they wanted to proceed to Wardha to meet Gandhi. They felt that they could not give Gandhi the trouble of taking the journey to Delhi which would be in the nature of a disrespect. It was explained that on account of security difficulties a visit to Wardha would be difficult and risky. They offered to go to Wardha by the ordinary train and assured that they felt quite safe undertaking the journey with Nehru as their escort. The matter was referred by Linlithgow to Churchill. He blatantly wrote to Chiang Kai-Shek, "Your suggested visit to Mr Gandhi at Wardha might impede the desire we have for rallying all India to the war front against Japan. Your Excellency will be so very kind as not to press the matter contrary to the wishes of the Viceroy or the King Emperor." For once Churchill allowed the Viceroy to have precedence over the "King Emperor"!

If Mohammed could not go to the "mountain", the "mountain" moved to meet "Mohammed". On hearing of this, Gandhi, even though unwell, took a train to Calcutta, where the Chiang Kai-Sheks had reached to emplane for Chunking, to meet them. The Chinese were overwhelmed by this gesture. After Gandhi's arrival, the Generalissimo and his wife, instead of waiting to receive him at Government House, went to call on him, and then offered to come later after he had rested and had his meal. Gandhi informed them that he had already eaten in the train to spend all the time he could with them till their departure. He also suggested that in case they would have an improvised Indian meal, they could stay on, and save time. They did. Government House, which preserved the ghosts of all the Nawabs from Hastings to Curzon, had never hitherto

suffered the social affrontery of official guests cancelling a meal, to eat with "rebels".

One leader who frankly felt displeased with Chiang Kai-Shek and his wife was Jinnah. Firstly they met Jinnah as casually as they met some of the other political leaders. They spent a lot of time with Nehru and a whole four hours with Gandhi. Madame Chiang Kai-Shek acted as translator when the Generalissimo talked to Nehru or Gandhi. But an official interpreter was called in during the interview with Jinnah. This was the time when Jinnah had begun to consider himself as important as Gandhi and was feeling touchy about his position.

Jinnah, having sponsored the idea of Pakistan, had yet no clear idea as to what he meant by Pakistan as applied to existing provinces. He had fathered an idea evolved by some British thinkers, and had made a shot in the dark. It had unexpectedly gathered more supporters than he had dreamt of. There were, however, many influential, serious-minded Muslim leaders, in the League and outside, who opposed any scheme to divide India. Although the Pakistan resolution was adopted at the Muslim League session in Lahore, Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, the Prime Minister of the Punjab, who had a more effective Muslim majority behind him in the North than Jinnah, opposed the concept of dividing India.⁶ The Khan brothers in the North-West Frontier, Fazlul Haq, the Premier of Bengal, and Khan Bahadur Allah Bux, the head of a Coalition Congress Ministry in Sind were all opposed to the division of the coun-

⁶ Speaking in the Punjab Legislative Assembly (March, 1941) he said, "I say, give complete autonomy and freedom to the units (provinces) and let them be demarcated into regions or zones on a territorial basis. The centre will be elastic in the sense that except for subjects entrusted to it by agreement, e.g. Defence, Maritime, Customs, Currency, Coinage and External Affairs, such other matters would be delegated to it as agreed to by the units. He said further, "We do not ask for freedom that there may be Muslim Raj here and Hindu Raj elsewhere. If that is what Pakistan means, I will have nothing to do with it... Punjab will not be Pakistan, but just Punjab, land of the five rivers. Punjab is Punjab and will always remain Punjab whatever anybody might say".

try and together were definitely more influential than Jinnah. They commanded a much wider following among Muslims.

The Congress leadership at this time, however, behaved tactlessly. Gandhi secured the election of Azad as Congress President, to fulfill a promise which Subhas had checkmated earlier. But Azad was not a convincing agency to settle communal issues, interim or ultimate with the Muslim leaders. Jinnah ridiculed him as a mere "mulla" and a "show boy" of the Congress. While the Congress had the support of the Red Shirts, the Ahrars, etc. Azad's personal following in the Congress had considerably dwindled. National-minded Muslim leaders further felt that if it came to "offices", Azad would be inclined to favour only some of his own "Muslim" supporters. British propaganda against him only emphasised the "show boy" image. Even some Congressmen began to believe that the Maulana was being preserved in the Congress Presidential Chair only to advertise the secular character of the Congress. For them Maulana Azad was a religious and not a secular personality. At Gandhi's instance, Maulana Azad offered to Jinnah that the Congress would have no objection if the control of the Central Government in the interim period was handed over to the Muslim League. It was a spectacular and generous offer. But Jinnah refused to take it seriously. Jinnah said to Pressmen: "Gandhi thinks I am a fool. Does he think that with Hindu majorities arrayed against it, the League in office will have any initiative or freedom?"

Rajagopalachari on the other hand alienated Jinnah by his over-cleverness. In his impatience for power, and in the hope that he was doing something really great, he hustled through a resolution by Congress members of the Madras Legislature accepting the principle of Pakistan. Jinnah welcomed the acceptance in principle but remarked that he did not want the type of "truncated and moth-eaten Pakistan" proposed by Rajaji. The damage, however, had been done! Within a few months the communal climate changed radically for the worse. Destiny was on the side of Jinnah. Pakistan became in the months to come a war cry, a slogan, an ideal for emotionally-

minded Muslims. Insensate though the demand was, it gathered momentum, supported by equally insensate British reactionaries and by disorder-seeking hooligans. A Frankenstein was born, imperilling the unity of India. Jinnah had fathered the beast, and the Congress had allowed it to grow.

Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal of England, arrived at this juncture on a one-man mission to explore a settlement with Indian leaders on the basis of "fresh proposals". Tall, wizard-eyed, animated, pipe-smoking, the Right Hon'ble Sir Stafford Cripps, P.C., K.C., F.R.S., M.P., had been not only one of the top legal luminaries of England but was a politician of outstanding ability. Son of a peer, Lord Parmoor, he had discarded his title and his tuxedoes to join the Labour Party. This was his second visit to India. Soon after the declaration of war, he took a private trip to India, his first, as he said at the time, "voyage of discovery". It was a short visit, in which he saw several cities, met many of India's great leaders, and returned convinced that India's demand for freedom could not be deferred. He went all the way to Wardha to meet Gandhi. He returned disporting a white khadi suit, and even a Gandhi cap. When I remarked that Cripps looked very much like a Kashmiri Pandit in his Gandhi cap, Cripps quipped: "Nehru would look very much like an Englishman in a Saville Row suit and a bowler hat. But believe me the Gandhi cap is more comfortable than the bowler hat." Addressing the House of Commons on his return from India, he said: "I believe we have to make up our minds, therefore, whether we are genuinely determined not in words but in action to give self-government to the people of India." He made some positive suggestions, which followed closely the then demands of the Congress. He had now come with official proposals from the British Government.

It was rumoured at the time that Roosevelt had been pressing Churchill to make a generous gesture to the Congress and to win over its support for the war effort. He sent Louis Johnson as a special representative to India to hold a watching brief. Johnson arrived a few days after Cripps. The news had

been cleverly spread that originally Churchill wanted to make a declaration assuring independence to India, but the Viceroy had protested, and the same was withdrawn. It was, therefore, felt that Cripps had been sent to win over both the Viceroy and the Congress.

Whether Cripps had a bad start, or he started badly, is difficult to say. Whether Cripps' mission was a political eyewash to appease American critics, or a feeler to judge what minimum could satisfy the Congress in its existing mood, has remained a mystery. The fact, however, is that Cripps' mission failed miserably. Soon after arrival on the 23rd of March, Cripps announced that his proposals would be a close secret, till he chose to release them to the Press. This by itself created an element of mystery, and offered to Pressmen a professional challenge. On the first day Cripps met only the Viceroy and the then members of the Executive Council. Among them were eight Indians recently added to it by Linlithgow. It was obvious that if his proposals succeeded, all eight of these would lose their jobs. Cripps did not realize that he had unfolded his "secret" to men who would be least interested in preserving it. By midnight we had exclusively obtained the full summary of the proposals.⁷ When my morning paper came out they were secret no longer. I showed the proposals to Gandhi and some of the Congress leaders. Gandhi was quick to react. In the course of a long interview, he summed up his feelings laconically : "The proposals are like a blank cheque on a crashing bank." Gandhi's reactions were flashed all over the world. Cripps told me later that the untimely "leakage" of the proposals and Gandhi's categorical rejection had sabotaged his mission before it was started.

Cripps soon realized that he was dealing with a hostile Viceroy, supported by a hostile bureaucracy, who had more friends in the British Cabinet than he had. The India Committee of the War Cabinet, on whose advice Churchill relied those days, consisted of five members, four of whom were

⁷This was a spectacular journalistic scoop made possible with the collaboration of P. D. Sharma, my special correspondent.

notorious reactionaries so far as India was concerned. Lord Simon had headed the fateful Simon Commission. The Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson, had been Governor of Bengal when Government terrorism, on the lines of "the Black-and-Tans" in Ireland, was let loose on the people. Sir James Clegg, the Secretary of State for war, had served as Finance Member in the Viceroy's Cabinet. He had shown extraordinary forensic ability in the Assembly to assail the Congress Opposition, not without an element of contempt, leading to uproarious protests. Mr Amery, the Secretary of State, had not been to India, but ever since his appointment he had rarely said a kind word about Indian politicians.

Cripps' proposals, even though they had been summarily condemned by Gandhi, offered a sporting chance to India acquiring substantial power immediately, and full power after the war. They would have enabled the Congress to employ the interregnum in settling communal differences, with the help of Muslims still wedded to the unity of India. It was unfortunate that at this crucial juncture Azad should have been Congress President, and as such should have been the principal agent of the Congress to negotiate with Cripps. Cripps wanted the Congress and other Indian leaders to read more between the lines than had been spelt out. The Maulana had to negotiate through an interpreter. He also wanted everything to be reduced to writing. Cripps therefore could not break the reserve that continued between them throughout the prolonged negotiations. As a sop to Jinnah, a clause had been introduced in Cripps' proposals leaving the option of seceding from the Union to any province subject to certain provisos. Azad being a Muslim, Cripps could not freely explain how, in practice, this clause would be ineffective, since it was unthinkable for a "whole" province at any time to exercise this option. Gandhi's opposition was based less on the merits of the proposals and more on ideological grounds. He apprehended that their acceptance would logically require India's fullest participation in the war and "Goodbye" to nonviolence. Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Kripalani and a few others blindly supported

Gandhi. They were however prepared to reconsider their position if Cripps spelt out clearly, in unambiguous language, that the Viceroy's Executive Council, apart from being entirely constituted by Indians from different parties, would have the status of a Cabinet, with the Viceroy as the constitutional head, and further that the Indian Minister of Defence will have very substantial powers in the guidance, direction and mobilisation for war. Nehru was for acceptance but lacked the courage to say so emphatically. The Congress had reached a stage of political masochism, through a process of continuous suffering, that anyone suggesting acceptance of office was suspected of weakness, or unwillingness to suffer more. Azad tried to sail between the negative attitude of Gandhi, Patel and Rajendra Prasad, and the positive approach of Nehru.

When Nehru finally entered the negotiations at Cripps' insistence, it was too late. Reactionary forces in England and India had already fouled the atmosphere. Even though Cripps was supposed to be consulting Linlithgow, the Viceroy had no knowledge that Cripps at one stage had assured Nehru that the Executive Council would have almost the status of a Cabinet. A delegation of the princes met Cripps the next day. Whether Cripps wanted further to convince the Congress of his bonafides, or he seriously believed that Congress was sure to accept his proposals, he told the princes: "Frankly, gentlemen, we are packing up. You will be well advised to settle with Gandhi and Nehru." The same day he told the representatives of the European Chamber of Commerce: "You must be prepared for a change in Government. I am sure the Congress leaders will give you a fair deal." The agitated princes and leaders of the European association the same evening disturbed Linlithgow at a tennis party in the Viceroy's House. Nehru meanwhile was willing to give Cripps' offer a fair trial. He almost converted a substantial following in the Working Committee to his way of thinking. But it was too late. The Viceroy had set the reactionary forces at work in England.

London soon intervened. It was now Cripps who began to resile from one position after another. He could not resist the

pressure of the Cabinet at home and the reactionary forces behind the Viceroy in India. By the end of the first week of April Cripps was no longer the smiling, affable, open-minded Cripps at all. He was reserved, even irritable and impatient. Finally, a stage was reached when he took up a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude towards the original proposals. Negotiations reached a breaking point. Louis Johnson, Roosevelt's newly arrived representative lent a hand. He met Nehru and Cripps several times. It was like offering artificial respiration to a dead man. While Congress leaders were still hoping to negotiate further, Cripps suddenly decided to pack up shop and go home. He was evidently acting under orders. On the very day he decided to leave India, Roosevelt was frantically persuading Churchill to ask Cripps to continue negotiations, as, according to Louis Johnson, things seemed nearer to a settlement. Roosevelt was politely informed that the date of his message unfortunately "coincided" with the date of Cripps' departure and hence his "wishes" could not be implemented.

During the negotiations Jinnah played his cards most skilfully. He did not like Cripps from the very start because Cripps did not show him the same deference as he showed Gandhi, Nehru and Azad. After a couple of interviews Cripps had taken Jinnah for granted and continued to meet Azad, or one Congress leader or another almost daily. Jinnah boiled with rage but did not openly resent this. He even did not resent Cripps' meeting other Muslim leaders, like Khan Bahadur Allah Bux, Premier of Sind and Chief of the Nationalist Muslims Conference, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, head of the Punjab Unionist Party and Premier of the Punjab and Fazlul Haq, Head of the Krishak Praja Party and Premier of Bengal. As a shrewd judge of situations, he maintained a sort of pretended indifference to Cripps, because, as he often remarked contemptuously to us, the League would not be a loser whether the Congress accepted Cripps' proposals or rejected them. "Pakistan" which was hitherto only a kite flown by the League, he said, had been accepted in the Cripps proposals in principle. The Congress rejection of the proposals could not

repudiate this part, so long as the British upheld it. Besides one group of Congress leaders led by Rajagopalachari had already offered Pakistan; "the rest does not matter". "I take advantage of their muddle-headedness," he said to queries in the lobby. "They are all mixed up in Gandhi's spiritualism and Nehru's idealism."

Jinnah called a meeting of the League executive and prepared two draft resolutions, which were secretly adopted. If the Congress accepted the proposals, the League would do likewise and ask for a fuller quota of representation in the Central Government, promising additionally full participation in the war effort. If the Congress rejected the proposals, the Muslim League would also reject the proposals, while appreciating the acceptance of the principle of "provincial option". It would then remain lukewarm to the war effort. When the Congress rejected the proposals, Jinnah released the second draft!

21

The Big Revolt: 1942

War had now reached India's doorsteps. Common people at this time were less concerned about the Japanese or the Germans, but more about spiralling prices of daily necessities, scarcity of food grains and the spectre of spreading epidemics. Thousands had started dying in Bengal of sheer starvation. The total of such deaths reached half a million. The allies suffered one defeat after the other. In the words of Churchill: "We had a long succession of misfortunes and defeats. Malaya, Singapore, Burma; only a few more marches, one more success, and Mussolini and Rommel would enter Cairo, or its ruins, together."¹

The Japanese forces were lined up from Cox Bazar to Kohima. Japanese submarines were freely operating in the Bay of Bengal, and had sunk nearly a hundred thousand tons of shipping. Calcutta port had been cleared. Japanese battleships and cruisers had been within an ace of occupying Trincomalee and Colombo, which would have given them easy control of Ceylon and Cape Comorin. Bombs had fallen on Vizagapatnam twice. But curiously enough there was no scare among the common people.²

¹ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. IV, p. 352.

² I was travelling by train from Madras to Calcutta. During the night, bombs had torn up the railway track, delaying the train by several hours. As soon as it was daylight, and we came to know the cause of the delay, all the passengers rushed out to witness the damage. A large crowd had already collected from the neighbourhood. Quite a few people had picked

I was in Calcutta at the time of the second bombing. Almost all over the city the planes dropped leaflets, but confined their bombing to Dalhousie Square around which most of the European business houses and Government buildings were located. In the same area stood the monument erected to the memory of three hundred English soldiers who at one time were allegedly caged in a small room, called the "Black Hole". The "Black Hole" story had been challenged by many students of history. Before his escape Subhash Bose had organized a protest for the removal of this monument commemorating a fiction. For this he was arrested. When the bombs fell, most people believed that the operation had been directed by Subhash Bose himself from the air to blow up the Black Hole monument. The fact that the bombs fell in a crowded square at daytime least bothered the hundreds who gathered in the Square. Britain's stock was very low and people eagerly counted the distance between the pot holes, and the column, and felt disappointed that the ugly symbol of imperial impertinence had not been blown up. "They will still get it," remarked one of the young men, sprouting a little of the betel juice on the base of the monument.

Subhash Bose had crossed over from Japan, and had made his initial headquarters in Saigon.³ He called for recruits and funds. A donation of several lakhs was made by the Indian settlers. He collected still larger funds from rich Indians in Malaya, Singapore and Burma. Apart from funds, he was

up the leaflets which had been dropped with the bombs. The leaflets contained an appeal to the people by Subhash to be prepared to join his army of liberation, as soon as it crossed into India. It appeared that two troop trains, with Dominion soldiers in transit, had passed earlier to Madras. I was the only one to remark how callous it would have been of the Japanese if the bombs had fallen on our train, or the earlier trains. Others felt excited, and remarked how well-informed the Japanese were, and how they had missed their targets only by a couple of hours.

³ Years later, I visited Saigon. It was by coincidence that I occupied, in the Grand Hotel, where his command was originally located, the very suite which was personally occupied by "Netaji". The Indian community still remembered his first speech in the main square attended by nearly 75,000 people.

able to enlist, from the hundred thousand prisoners of war, mostly Indians, a large contingent of trained, well-armed, able-bodied soldiers, willing to lay down their lives for the liberation of India. Indian soldiers at the time were feeling disgusted with the manner in which they had been betrayed and left to fend for themselves. They rallied to the banner of Subhash. The officers and the men got together, collected arms, started training, till a formidable force could march into Burma. Here they found more Indian soldiers ready to avenge the wrong that had been done to them. Memories of the betrayal at Sittang were still fresh. Many of the able-bodied civilians also enlisted as recruits. Gradually, the "Indian National Army" had its "Generals", "Brigadiers" and "Colonels". Thousands of devoted, dedicated men, in and out of uniform, prepared for any sacrifice, joined it. The Japanese helped with arms, supplies and know-how. But the control of the INA was vested in the "Provisional Government of Azad Hind".

Subhash Bose had all the makings of a benevolent dictator: dedicated, fearless, flamboyant, and strict as a disciplinarian. He loved wearing a uniform. He was a born leader. He shared with his men their sufferings. He was with them wherever the risk and the need were greatest. He shared with them the rigours of camp life, partook of their simple rations and when necessary slept with them on the bare floor. The Japanese had installed a powerful radio station in Saigon. It was made available to Subhash and the Indian National Army for direct broadcasts to India. Thousands in India listened to the broadcasts from Saigon and reacted jubilantly to the exploits of the Indian National Army. Unreported defeats of the British, though highly exaggerated, were believed as facts. British claims were rejected as "propaganda".

Bhagat Singh and his followers had introduced the vibrant cry of "Inquilab Zindabad". The Indian National Army adopted the slogan "Jai Hind". Subhash chose one of the most stirring poems of Tagore—Jan Gan Man Adhinayak—as the National Anthem of the Indian National Army.⁴ In all his

⁴ Later "Jai Hind" became the slogan of free India, and poet Tagore's

speeches, Subhash called his army to fight their way to Delhi, and plant the flag of independence on the ramparts of the Red Fort.

Subhash and the "Indian National Army" had even solved the problem which continued to baffle Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians had shed their differences. They lived and ate together. Whatever their beliefs or manner of worship, they considered themselves Indians first and last. They had learnt to follow one leader, Subhash, live under one flag—the tricolour, raise one common war cry—"Jai Hind", sing one national anthem, and to fight and die for a common motherland "Hindustan".⁵

In the upper Congress echelons the reactions to this sudden emergence of Subhash to nationwide popularity were divergent. Vallabhbhai Patel and his close henchmen had still not outlived the personal prejudices against Subhash. They dared not say anything against him now, without risk to their own popularity. They were also afraid that if Subhash did succeed in marching to Delhi at the head of his army, he may also think of settling some old scores with them. They, therefore, cunningly but obliquely suggested that India should fight the "Japanese", and even resist any "Indians" who may invade India's frontiers with "their" help. The implication being that Subhash and the "Indian National Army" were part of an unholy alliance. Nehru's attitude towards the Japanese was influenced by their savage attack on China. While he still had the greatest regard for Subhash, and felt secretly proud of some of the achievements of the "Indian National Army", he was firmly convinced that the Japanese would only use Subhash

memorable verses were adopted by free India as the National Anthem. "Delhi Chalo" was a revival of the slogan of the Indian regiment that marched to Delhi from Meerut in 1857.

⁵When Gandhi met these brave soldiers after independence in the Red Fort, they remarked that they had become strangers to such distinctions as "Hindu Tea" and "Muslim Coffee" and could not understand the talk of Hindus and Muslims being two separate nations. He wished he could do what Subhash had done and inject the same spirit which had inspired them into every Indian!

and the "Indian National Army" as a means to secure Indian goodwill. Once they entered India, the Japanese would betray him and would do exactly as they had done in China. India would thus be faced with a new and more menacing form of imperialism. His study of international developments convinced him that if Russia collapsed under Hitler's pressure—and Hitler's forces were already in Stalingrad and the Caucasus—then the Germans and the Japanese would, in a final attempt at world supremacy, make a rendezvous in Delhi, splitting the world between themselves. He made no bones about the fact that Subhash was on the wrong side of the fence.

It came as a complete surprise to his Congress detractors, and a welcome news to his millions of admirers, when the Saigon Radio announced that the "Indian National Army" had liberated the first Indian territory—the island of Andamans. This had hitherto been used by the British as the "Albatross" to isolate dangerous political convicts. All political prisoners were released. Those in good health joined the INA. A "Provisional Government of Azad Hind" was established on Indian soil in the Islands. The President of the Government and Commander-in-Chief of the INA, Subhas Bose unfurled the Indian tricolour over its headquarters. There was no mention of the Japanese, or the Japanese flag. A wave of jubilation passed over India, and people even went round distributing sweets. But Vallabhbhai and his friends felt chagrined. Gandhiji, who was atleast by connivance a party to the bulldozing of Subhash out of the Congress, suddenly began to express admiration for the courage of Subhash and the Indian National Army. Subhash in return declared on the Saigon Radio that "There were no differences between me and Gandhiji, and, like me, Gandhiji is out to fight for freedom at any cost."

During Cripps' stay in Delhi, a foreign agency flashed the news that Subhash had been killed in an air crash. Shops in many cities closed. Students took out mammoth processions. The whole nation went into mourning. Congress leaders remained silent and indifferent. Gandhi, however, immediately wired to the mother of Subhash, condoling with her, and

expressing the highest praise for the heroism and bravery of "a great son of India". Later, speaking to Pressmen, he called him a "patriot among patriots, misguided in his methods may be, but dedicated, fearless and brave".

Subhash, however, had not died. The news was false. But he heard what Gandhi had said. He returned the compliment with a graciousness that further deeply touched Gandhi. The Indian National Army regularly celebrated Gandhi's birthday. But on his seventy-fifth, a formal ceremony was held in Rangoon. The INA men in uniform lined up around the national flag. A mammoth crowd witnessed the parade. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the Commander-in-Chief of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, mounted the rostrum and unfurled the national flag to the playing of the National Anthem. He then moved forward and placed a large garland around the portrait of Gandhi. The Army gave a military salute. Netaji, saluting the Mahatma, and addressing the portrait, said in solemn dignity: "Father of our nation! In this holy war for India's liberation, we ask for your blessings and good wishes."

When Gandhi asked some Pressmen, after Cripps had left, what the popular feelings were about the war, one of them said: "Very anti-British, but deeply pro-Japanese. Subhash and the Indian National Army have made a world of difference in Japan's favour."

Such was then the situation in the middle of 1942, when the British in India, for the first time, began to take the war in the East seriously. On the psychological front an organization had been set up under the pompous name of "The National War Front," which spent millions to build up "moral" support for the war effort. To counteract the unsympathetic attitude of the nationalist press, expensive space was purchased to employ the advertising columns to undo the hostility of editorial writers. Writers, poets, Pandits, Maulvis, Granthis, singing girls, courtesans, astrologers, willing to lend their talent, were put on the pay-roll, to let loose a many-sided, multi-purpose, cacophonic propaganda for the war effort.

Nothing had been heard of a "Communist Party" ever since sixteen so-called Communists were tried in the late twenties in the well-known Meerut Conspiracy Case. As war progressed, one suddenly heard more and more of the "Communist Party". It gradually emerged as a powerful wing of the National War Front, holding public meetings, organizing processions, and in many other ways trying to mobilise support for what the "party" now acclaimed as the "Peoples' War". Mysterious hands stretching from Moscow to Washington supplied ample funds. At a time when nationalist papers had no choice but to use junk machines, new modern printing presses became available to the party to publish, not one, but three newspapers. The Communists, the Hindu and Muslim communalists, and the loyalists now became the pillars of the War Front.

Into this motley galaxy of war supporters there soon entered the gilded order of the princes. The princes had contributed lavishly to the War Fund, and taxed heavily their own people. They, more than the Government of India, had used the Defence of India Rules to suppress every kind of internal opposition, personal or political, whether it emerged from Praja Mandals or blackmailers. To emphasise a war atmosphere in their States, the Indian rulers gave up their brocades, silks and diamond-studded achkans. Instead, they now dispored the military uniforms of their honorary ranks. In proportion to the contributions in men and money, and the status of their States, they were offered, in the British army, ranks from Colonel to Major-General. In their own States, to make confusion worse confounded, they conferred on some of their Ministers, officers and courtiers honorary ranks from Captains to Colonels in their own private armies. When the Princes' Chamber met for its annual session, princely limousines went about packed with Generals, Brigadiers, Colonels, Captains and Majors. To the common people it seemed as if after the surrender of the Indian armies abroad, all the officers had been salvaged and had taken residence in New Delhi. What seemed, however, perplexing was that some officers from the front had

returned so inordinately bloated that even walking in some cases seemed to involve considerable effort.

Lord Wavell had been demoted. He was now the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian forces. Earlier, he had gone under the pompous title of Supreme Commander of the Imperial forces in India and the East. The command covered all the forces from Hong Kong to Rangoon and Bombay. With the fall of every country from Hong Kong to Burma under his command, Lord Wavell came to be named by the enemy radio the "Master of strategic retreats".

To lend cheer to depression in the life of the capital, there appeared a refreshing socio-military element called the WACCI. Petite, gay, disciplined, adventurous, these volunteers in the war effort came from England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, Saigon, Burma and, last but not least, the metropolitan cities of India. Their social status was undefined, their sphere of activity seemed unlimited. Their duties carried them from tending to the wounded and the disabled, to driving the Colonel to dinner and sharing it with him. Princes vied with Subalterns, and Brigadiers with Batmen, to win their favours. They brought smiles to the wounded, comfort to the disabled, added gaiety to dance parties and introduced the lustre of romance in periodic black-outs.

Apart from adopting expensive psychological morale-booster, the government also took spectacular steps towards the country's defence. A state of black-out was declared in all major cities. On test black-out nights even the road lights were extinguished. In addition, favoured contractors were employed to dig trenches three feet wide and four feet deep in various parts of congested cities to serve as "shelters" during bomb attacks. Since in England bomb shelters, even the heavy masonry ones, had proved of no avail, these trenches seemed to common people a joke. A.R.P. officers were appointed to instruct people in taking shelter in case of a raid. One of the A.R.P. officers with his men had specially invited us to demonstrate A.R.P. precautions. It was the night of a half black-out.

I had earlier written that the trenches were of little use, as people could neither sit in them conveniently sheltering their heads from the blast, nor lie down in case of real danger. As a loyal servant of His Majesty, he ordered his three men to duck at the blowing of the whistle and lie flat with him, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the "shelters". When the four came out, they looked like college freshmen emerging out of a soak pit after a "Rag". In Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and other places, children, beggars, dogs and stray vagrants found these trenches most convenient, in the absence of public toilets and lavatories. Favoured contractors were ordered to build "blast shelters" in different parts of big cities. These were just walls of brick and masonry closing in shop fronts or the verandahs of important buildings. Fortunately, their utility was never put to the test. After two rainy seasons they suffered from the natural processes of erosion, much to the satisfaction of the contractors and the relief of those who had been walled in.

The British felt that the time had also come for "personal sacrifices". Lord Wavell took the lead. The Saigon Radio had let it be known that Wavell had retreated so fast because he wanted to recoup in Simla. Wavell declared that he and the military commanders would not shift for the summer to Simla. Australian regiments had been seen in what later came to be known as the "bush shirt"—a sort of jacket, a cross between a shirt and a coat, worn without a tie. Much to the chagrin of his class, Wavell adopted the bush shirt as informal attire. It soon became the most popular garment next to a military tunic. Even princes began to wear it, and the peons and porters found it highly convenient.

As the Japanese advanced, Wavell, his army chiefs and top European officials busied themselves with a master plan of disciplined and orderly evacuation so that the blunders of Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore and Burma were not repeated. Right from Calcutta to Bombay secret arrangements were completed for evacuating European officers and civilians, and all white military personnel, in case the Japanese succeeded in entering India. Railway trains and transport were meticulously ear-

marked and appropriately allocated. Temporary accommodation was reserved family-wise and regiment-wise in Fort William, in other fortresses and cantonments, and in major cities. Every single prospective evacuee family or personnel were secretly informed where to go during the emergency. Secret orders were issued to demolish or destroy everything of military value to the enemy from the borders of Burma to Bombay, including factories, ammunition dumps and stores. Although greatest secrecy was being observed in making these preparations, the news of what was called "Operation Arrow" leaked out. People were alarmed. They felt that the preparations for resistance were only a cover for insuring a safe and orderly evacuation by the British.

The Congress leaders felt that the situation could brook no delay. Nehru felt desperate. He even suggested that a guerrilla force be organized to fight the Japanese in case the British capitulated. Jayaprakash Narayan and the younger socialists wanted to organize an underground revolt against the British. It was in this state of confusion and despair that Gandhi once again took control of affairs. The recluse of Sevagram had been hitherto disregarded by the Working Committee as a spent force. Again he emerged from his self-imposed isolation to lead the nation in its hour of peril.

Gandhi called upon the people to organize large bands of volunteers to render service to the homeless, the wounded or the dying. "In case an invasion takes place," he said, "it should be resisted by offering complete nonviolent non-cooperation to the invading force." The Japanese were to be given no assistance. "We may not bend the knee to the aggressor, nor obey any of his orders." Regarding the scorched-earth policy the British had planned, he said, "I see neither bravery nor sacrifice in destroying life or property for offence or defence." But "nonviolent resistance," he said, will refuse the Japanese "any help, even water", and people should "on no account lean on the Japanese to get rid of the British power".

As to the British, Gandhi had reached the end of his patience. He did not want the horrors of Malaya, Singapore

and Burma to be repeated. He did not want a collapsing power to destroy ammunition dumps, food stores, valuable buildings, installations, factories, railways and shipping, as had been done in Singapore and Rangoon.

"India is being ground down," he said, with vehemence, "even before the Japanese advent, not for India's defence, and no one knows for whose defence." He was afraid that if he and the Congress leaders did not take effective action to free India, people's "hidden discontent will burst forth into a welcome to the Japanese, should they effect a landing". Britain, he felt, "was on the brink of an abyss" and would do anything to save itself disregarding the interests of India or the Indian people. When someone reminded him that the British were fighting for democracy, he flared up and retorted, "If a band of robbers have among themselves a democratic constitution in order to enable them to carry on their robbing operations more effectively, they do not deserve to be called a democracy." Thus, said Gandhi, "British presence invited the Japanese, it promotes communal disunion and other disorders."

So, one day, Gandhi woke up, having seen, while half awake and half asleep, the words "Quit India" blazoned before his eyes. To him the inspiration had come! He felt again like a man possessed! The idea of asking the British to "quit India" burst upon him suddenly. As he told Press correspondents later, "I do not wish to humiliate the British, but the British must go." If the British go at once, asked a correspondent, "who will take over?" So desperate was Gandhi, so desperate was India, that Gandhi said: "Leave India to God or anarchy." When asked about the struggle, Gandhi said, "It will be a mass movement of a strictly nonviolent character," and added "my biggest movement."⁶ The A.I.C.C. was called to meet in Bombay on August 7th to consider and if approved to adopt the Gandhi plan of "Quit India".

Jinnah, who had watched indifferently the threat of Japanese invasion, suddenly woke up to the "danger" to Muslims "if the British withdrew". He found in the Congress decision a

⁶ Tendulkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI. p. 156.

conspiracy by the "majority" to dominate the "minority". His ingenuity in these matters was amazing. The British valued such oblique help, especially when it was so timely. But there were many, even among Muslims, who felt that Jinnah was betraying the nation to help not the Muslims but the British.

The All-India Muslim League was to meet in Bombay.⁷ A few days before the meeting, one Rafiq Sabri walked up to Jinnah's well-guarded mansion on Malabar Hill, a little after 1 p.m. Jinnah had not yet risen for lunch. Rafiq greeted the watchman and explained that he wanted to see the "Qaid-e-Azam". He was taken to the secretary, and then unushered walked into the room where Jinnah was working. "My whole mind was on my correspondence," related Jinnah later, "and as I was about to leave the room, in the twinkling of an eye the accused sprang at me and gave me a blow with his clenched fist on my left jaw. I naturally reeled back a bit, when he pulled out a knife from his waist." A scuffle followed. Many people soon appeared on the scene. Rafiq Sabri was arrested. Jinnah suffered a cut on his chin and on his hand. After the wounds were dressed Jinnah returned to his desk. Rafiq Sabri admitted his guilt and volunteered the statement that "he believed it his duty to kill Jinnah because he was a tool in the hands of British imperialism".

At this very time I was able to obtain copies of a secret circular sent out by Sir Frederick Puckle, then Home Secretary, to all Governors, top officers and chief organizers of the National War Front.⁸ Its contents created a national sensation. "We have three weeks until the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on August the 7th," wrote Puckle. "During this time the matter is mainly of propaganda to mobilise opinion against the concrete proposals contained in the Congress resolution, and against the threat with which the resolution concludes, described by Gandhi as 'open rebellion'... Please intensify your publicity through all available channels

⁷ July 26. The League meeting was cleverly called ahead of the meeting of the AICC summoned for August 7.

⁸ It was dated 17th July, 1942.

with the aim of securing openly expressed and reasoned opposition to the scheme of the resolution from individuals and important non-Congress organizations." The lines of publicity suggested by him were as unscrupulous as they were perverse. He wanted supporters, paid or otherwise, to preach that the resolution "was a direct invitation to Japan to over-run East India and that Congress leaders had become the heroes of the axis broadcasts". Although he "advised" that at the present stage Congress may not be called "a fifth column", he suggested as much. Supporters were also assured that if the Congress did decide to launch a mass movement after August 7, it would be suppressed by measures which would be in the nature of a "blitzkreig".

For a time the Government and the Congress forgot the Japanese, the axis powers and the war. Suddenly the lackadaisical British bureaucrats became active. Armies were withdrawn from several fronts and stationed at strategic cantonments, and in and around big cities. The police force all over the country was armed and trebled. Special corps of "watch and ward officers" were mobilised from Anglo-Indian and Eurasian youths, and in some places from among the local hooligans and hoodlums, trained to bludgeon those who may rise in opposition, at a given signal.

The A.I.C.C. met on the 7th of August, 1942. From the 1st of August till the actual meeting, rumours were afloat that the top leaders would be arrested before the meeting. A state of acute tension prevailed all over the country. The assemblage on August 7 could hardly be called a meeting of the A.I.C.C. The pandal contained more than twenty-five thousand eager, anxious, admiring listeners. Abul Kalam Azad presided. Nehru moved and Vallabhbhai Patel seconded the main resolution. Nehru declared that the resolution was not a threat but an invitation and an offer of cooperation from a free India. "On any other terms our resolution," he said, "promises only conflict and struggle." Vallabhbhai said if the terms offered were not accepted the Congress was out to launch an all-out struggle to overthrow the British. Gandhi spoke to pin-drop silence

as a man inspired, as if through him was speaking some "divine voice". His speech did not stir the audience. But every word bored into their hearts. Every sentence seemed like a divine command. His speech lacked the rhetoric of a Cicero, but had the ring of a prophet! Never again was he heard to speak with such soul-stirring gravity or with so much depth of feeling. No commander could have sent out his command to the waiting millions all over the country, with so much authority and in a voice softened with the intensity of great spiritual confidence. "Occasions like the present," he said, "do not occur in everybody's life, and but rarely in anybody's life," he said. "If in the present crisis, when the earth is being scorched by the flames of *himsa* and is crying for deliverance, I failed to make use of my God-given talent, God will not forgive me and I shall be judged unworthy of a great fight. I must act now." He said further: "I want freedom immediately, this very night, before dawn, if it can be had!"

Gandhi issued a brief, simple code of directives after the session, in case he was arrested. He suggested a national *hartal*, fast and prayers, the taking of a vow by the people that they will ceaselessly carry on the struggle and either they will be "free or die". There was to be no suspension of the movement on any account. "Do or die" should be the slogan. "Quit India is our demand." Sunday dawned and there was no freedom. Instead the Government launched a well-planned blitzkrieg against the Congress. Gandhi and the Working Committee were arrested at the break of dawn. Thousands of others all over the country were hauled up, some who had by then not even known of the final Congress instructions. Congress Committees were declared illegal and Congress offices were put under police custody. Men who had been idling at dinner parties and in dance halls while Japan was threatening the border, had suddenly become alert, aggressive and active on the "home front". Every possible repressive measure and repressive action was adopted to crush the Congress. The Government and the people both went mad, and a tornado of hate and violence raged over the country for several months.

Black Terror and Dim Twilight

Armsdale, though more than a few furlongs removed from the graystone, castle-shaped Viceregal Lodge in Simla, was part of the Viceregal Estate. In structure it was reminiscent of the red gabled cottages of Grenoble and Nancy in France. Inside, it combined a colonial concept of comfort with a French sense of elegance. In the garden, lilies, nasturtiums, fusias, daffodils, bloomed in wild profusion. In the distance rose the majestic undulating peaks of the Himalayas, with their eternal snow-line blending with the horizon.

On a day in June, in the verandah, reclining on a Victorian easy chair sat a bearded old man peering into the distance. He sat seemingly oblivious of everything around him, smoking cigarette after cigarette, engrossed as it were in an unending dream. It was strange to find someone who till a few days ago had been, as a rebel, isolated in a remote fortress for three years, in a cottage reserved by Viceroys for high-ranking guests. The irony was not lost on Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, who genially smiled, as I disturbed him in his reverie, and said, "Ring that bell for someone to bring you a chair, and then we will order some tea. The service here is very much better than we had at Ahmednagar Fort.¹ In both places I have lived on a 'no charge' basis. About Ahmednagar, there was an element of hard reality. This feels like a passing illusion." He pointed to the costly furniture, the plush carpets

¹ Azad and other members of the Working Committee were locked up in Ahmednagar Fort from 1942 onwards.

and the silk tapestry. As we settled down after tea, I asked the Maulana if I were not interfering with any of his programme. He explained that he was expecting Gandhiji, Nehru and others during the next two days. Till then he had all the time to relax. "We will go for a walk a little later," he suggested, "and if you are not otherwise engaged stay over for dinner. They expect me to have guests. They prepare enough for six".

"How was the food in Ahmednagar?" I asked. Having known the Maulana for years and having spent a few months with him in prison, I knew that the Maulana was an epicure, without being a gourmet, and, where Indian food was concerned, even a bit of a connoisseur. "It was awful in the beginning," he said. "In fact everything was awful during the first few weeks. The barracks were unclean, the watch and ward was strict, the behaviour of the staff rude, and the food worse than one would place before one's dog. But then we tamed 'Cheeta Khan'."² This was the nickname Congress leaders in Ahmednagar had given to the jail warden. The Maulana liked a pun now and then. "'Cheeta Khan' finally produced a good cook, gave us good food, and also changed his own behaviour."

The Maulana gave me some interesting details of the manner in which he, Nehru and other members of the Working Committee took to gardening in Ahmednagar Fort, held long discussions, read and wrote between intervals, and otherwise maintained a regular time-table from early morning to sunset. It reminded me of the prison days I had spent in the company of the Maulana. We wanted to read, but the books were few and the time was plenty. We used to import books like *The Life of Mazzini*, *Russian Revolution* by Trotsky, *The Indian War of Independence*, etc. covered in innocent-looking jackets of novels by Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo or P. G. Woodhouse. One had all the time for exercise, but going round and round in the small, walled compound made us feel like animals in a cage. One hungered for company. But, barring one's political colleagues, the only company we could get was of cut-throats, thieves, cat burglars, smugglers and pick-pockets. One

² Mr. Tiger.

developed an amazing appetite in prison. And yet sometimes the very look of jail food brought about nausea, which excess of appetite only accentuated.

"Life became quite tolerable after a year or so," said the Maulana, waking me out of my reverie. "But the little garden we grew in the jail compound, with our own hands, was something which brought us a sense of beauty, and a fine diversion. Looking at these flowers (here he pointed to the lawn colourfully bursting with fragrant blossoms), "I was reminded of our little garden, and how much every stalk that sprouted, every bud that showed up and every flower that bloomed was news! These years brought us closer to each other. Sometimes we fought like children. But all the time we shared each other's pains and sorrows like brothers." There were tears in the Maulana's eyes. I could see that he had suddenly remembered the great loss that he himself had suffered while in prison. His wife had died ailing. He had neither been informed of her illness, nor permitted to be by her bed-side when the fatal moment came. Gandhi who had been in Agha Khan Palace during the same period suffered two bereavements. His chief lieutenant, a stout young capable youth, Mahadev Desai, died suddenly before medical aid could come. Within a year Kasturba died. Such was the toll of prison! "If the authorities had given any thought to our sentiments, these would have been decencies one remembers. And yet their indecency is something one cannot forget." One other death had come as a shock to India at this time. The death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. He died in an air crash on his way from Saigon to Japan. For a long time, the report remained unconfirmed and for years the fiction of Netaji being still alive was periodically revived, by his supporters on the authority of his brother Sarat Bose. Later on it was revealed that Subhash had left a widow in Austria and a daughter. He was within an ace of his greatest triumph when he died!

"Tell me all that happened after our arrest," said the Maulana. "I have heard things in bits and pieces, but still do not have a living picture of the events of the last three years.

We were completely isolated from the outside world and time for us seemed to have come to a stop. We even started counting the wrinkles on each other's faces, and the number of gray hair across each one's temples."

After they were all arrested, I related, a storm burst all over the country. No one knew what the leaders wanted the people to do. Mr Amery, however, came out with the statement that it was part of the contemplated programme of the Congress to organize a nationwide boycott, to cut wires, obstruct communications, encourage strikes and do everything possible to paralyse the war effort. Bulabhai Desai was unwell and was not arrested. He said to me that according to what some of the leaders had told him, except eschewing violence to life, everything was contemplated in the programme. Mrs Aruna Asaf Ali³ had been the last to see off her husband and the Congress leaders. She confirmed this omnibus programme. Almost as if a common whisper had spread all over the country, mysterious hands started cutting off telegraph wires and telephone cables. Rails were removed from the tracks at many places. Bridges were sabotaged. Skilled hands tampered with the equipment of locomotives, so that the trains could not run. The seats in the trains were ripped, the windows smashed, and lights and fans put out of commission. A rash of incendiary activity started all over the country. In Delhi in a single day a multi-storied railway office was burnt to the ground. An exclusive club where "Indians and dogs" were not permitted was set on fire. A part of the district court was burnt. Incendiary bombs were thrown in two police stations. Side by side with these nationwide attempts at sabotage and incendiarism, started a spate of flag-hoisting ceremonies, public meetings, demonstrations, strikes and hartals. All over the country, on the walls, on the highways, on railway trains and anywhere and everywhere one could read stencilled in bold letters Gandhi's last brief slogans "Do or Die" and "Quit India".

This "do or die" business, I told the Maulana, led me into a dangerous trap one day. The secret hideouts of Congress leaders

³ Wife of Asaf Ali, a member of the Working Committee.

who had gone underground were many, varying from servants' quarters to unoccupied garages. For some time we had an empty bungalow on Curzon Road available to us. One day a large consignment arrived from Bombay containing "Alfonso man-goes". It contained a large number of "Do or Die" and "Quit India" wood blocks and stencils, half a dozen heavy telephone-cable cutters, etc. The next morning I put the entire lot in the boot of my car, and drove to Curzon Road. As I turned in at the gate, I saw to my shock a high-ranking Indian police-officer. I knew him very well. Inside were half a dozen policemen standing in the porch. I could not even pretend that I had come to see a friend. Feigning as if I had got the news of a police raid on the premises, I asked the Officer the reason for the raid and if anything incriminating had been found. He took me inside, saying, "Well, come and see for yourself." We went round the rooms and servants' quarters. They were all completely empty. We laughed. But my heart was losing several beats every minute because of the incriminating material in the boot of my car. At one stage the officer left me and was in conference with one of his subordinates. Later, when he escorted me to my car, and as I was driving out, he said, "Be careful in locking the boot of your car. Things can sometimes be stolen." I learnt later that a "mysterious" person had telephoned to the workers in the bungalow that the premises would be raided the next morning. That is how the workers could remove almost cartloads of equipment including cyclostyling machines and typewriters, leaving the premises empty.

After setting fire to the multi-storyed railway building, Satyavati, the Joan of Arc of Delhi and two of her companions crossed the railway line and surprised me in my office, both with the news, and with the request to escort them to some hideout. I put them in my car. As we were driving in the direction opposite to where the flames were rising to the skies, a patrolling police party stopped us. They were stopping everybody for a check. The officer looked at my companions. He evidently recognised me and Satyavati who had by then appeared more than a thousand times in Congress meetings

and demonstrations. He allowed us to go. Next morning the officer came to my office with a child's autograph book. He said he had related the previous day's incident to his wife and his little daughter. He had promised the latter an autograph of the "renowned" lady. He called for it two days later and I got the autograph for him.

For the first time the Congress was able to instal its own secret radio station in Bombay. It proved more effective as a means of propaganda than our bulletins. I was informed of its location by "Akbar", the secret name under which Purshottam Trikumdas of the Socialist Party was then operating. I was searching for the particular house-number given to me when I found two people suspiciously standing on the roadside. I casually asked them for direction. They volunteered to direct me if I revealed my identity. I did. I was later surprised to learn that both of them were CID men, who for a week had been set on the job of locating the radio station. They had delayed their discovery to enable the radio station to move to new premises. This sort of thing had happened in most places. If British officers were watching, policemen would beat up Congress volunteers mercilessly, disperse mobs almost savagely and break up meetings with lathi blows. At the same time, in several different ways, they did a lot to help us, to give us useful information to send timely warnings to foil the designs of the bureaucracy.

The August 1942 movement was like a series of volcanic eruptions. It was nonviolent only to the extent that in this eruptive turmoil no violence was shown to any Britisher, man, woman or child, except maybe for a stray incident here or there. This despite the fact that by mobilising goondas, anglo-Indian cadets and all sorts of hooligans, savage violence was let loose by the bureaucracy, the like of which had never been witnessed before. Thousands were arrested, thousands flogged, whipped and baton-baited. In jails, no distinction was made between hardened criminals and political offenders. If at all, the former were treated leniently to heighten the contrast. Government replied sabotage with lawlessness, violence to

property with violence to persons, public demonstrations with ruthless repression, collective fines, confiscation of property and the imposition of punitive police rule. It was India's last great rebellion with violence directed towards everything touching the administration except human beings. It was also Britain's last ruthless, savage orgy of repression, in which neither life nor property was sacred. But after the fury was over, Britain realized that it could only depend on a lot of mercenaries in India. It could no longer count on the loyalty even of the police, or of the army, or of many sections of the Civil Service.

Gandhi went on a twenty-one day fast in the Agha Khan Palace. Linlithgow left after seven years of Viceroyalty. The twenty-one-day fast by Gandhi was his last conclusive act in the "Do or Die" movement. Gandhi had written to Linlithgow, severely criticising the brutalities that were being perpetrated in the name of law and order, and charging that all the statements made about him in the Government quarters in this connection "contain palpable departures from the truth." The only answer he got was from Churchill who said in Parliament that the British Government wanted no compromise with Gandhi. "Gandhism and all that it stands for will have to be grappled with and finally crushed."

The Viceroy offered to set Gandhi free for the duration of the fast. Gandhi refused. Gandhi was then seventy-four. He weighed less than 114 pounds. As the fast proceeded, the health bulletins were awaited with as much anxiety all over India, and in many parts of the world, as major news of war happenings. Dozens of Indian and foreign correspondents migrated to Poona. Hundreds of thousands of men and women observed partial or complete fasts, lasting several days. There was a deep silent stir in the air, more volcanic than the violent eruption of 1942. Leaders from all over the country, got together, took deputations, passed resolutions, and in various ways brought pressure on the Government to set Gandhi free unconditionally. Three members of the Viceroy's Executive Council resigned under public pressure: H. P. Mody,

N. R. Sarkar and M. S. Aney. Unlike his earlier fasts, nausea started on the fourth day. On the sixth day his heartbeats became feeble. By the twelfth day dangerous signs of uramia developed in the blood. His condition was deemed grave. Mr Phillips, then President Roosevelt's personal representative in India, requested to meet Gandhi. The permission was refused.⁴ Phillips left India in a huff.

Meanwhile, the Government started preparing for the worse, with a callousness unknown even in medieval times. By the thirteenth day they felt certain that Gandhi would die. Officials reported that he was almost dead. Instructions were sent out as to what positions in different towns and in Poona the police and the army should take in the event of Gandhi's death. With ironic regard for "ritual", a few maunds of sandal wood was secretly imported to Poona to be available for the cremation. Even two *pandits*⁵ were retained on tap for performing the cremation ceremony according to Hindu rites. A Government communique had been carefully drafted to serve as an obituary offering by the Viceroy. The route of the funeral procession was carefully demarcated. Some of the enterprising American correspondents, having secretly got to know the route, had selected appropriate spots from where they could take shots and close-ups of the funeral. Half a dozen of them held night-and-day vigils outside the Agha Khan Palace, lest they miss the greatest scoop of history. Some even bribed the guards to get the earliest "inside dope".

After he had lost fourteen pounds, Gandhi was too weak to be weighed. He fainted twice. The uramia increased. The pulse became almost imperceptible. According to Mrs Sarojini Naidu, who was the first to be released and was then with Gandhi in the Agha Khan Palace, doctors were now unanimous that if the fast was not ended Gandhi had only a few hours to live. The

⁴I knew Phillips well. He was a truly liberal-minded American. He most objectively and honestly apprised Roosevelt of the actual state of things in India. He soon became a *persona-non-grata* with the bureaucrats. But so long as he had Roosevelt's support, they could do nothing about it.

⁵Priests.

British medical officer attending on Gandhi restlessly moved around Gandhi's bed. At one time he decided to give an injection of glucose. He found the patient completely unconscious, almost dead. Gandhi suddenly opened his eyes and begged of the doctor not to "interfere with the will of God". "But it is my medical duty," said the physician, "to save life even without the consent of the patient, and sometimes despite his opposition." Gandhi replied in his feeble voice: "I respect and appreciate your sense of duty. Give me and my Master twenty-four hours more; and if there is no improvement and there is still serious danger to my life, I will accept your help." The doctor, an Englishman, agreed with tears in his eyes. During the next twenty-four hours, he and other medical attendants did not sleep. The patient was under close and constant observation. Gandhi remained either unconscious or in the spell of a deep silent prayer. On the 14th day, according to the medical bulletin, "the crisis had passed. Gandhi's mind seemed clearer". The Uramia was slowly receding. The pulse remained feeble, but there was very little nausea. He was sleeping more restfully. He was even able to recognize visitors easily, and once smilingly asked his physician, "Is the Supreme Doctor helping?"

On the final day of the fast, even though still very weak, Gandhi looked cheerful and mentally alert. Dr B. C. Roy who had joined other attendants during the fast said: "Mahatmaji has again fooled us all!" When Sir Homi Mody, one of the Indian members of the Executive Council who had resigned in protest, met him later and congratulated him on his recovery, Gandhi said, "I still hope to live up to 125 years." Homi Mody retorted, "Why did you not tell me earlier, I would not have resigned."

Seemingly it had been just a fast, like many other fasts. But these three weeks of tension had done more to undermine what was left of British authority in India than the three cyclonic years of the August rebellion. Every Englishman began to feel that a deep silent stirring was spreading, and that nothing could save British authority any more except machine guns and bombs.

The tide of war however had by now turned in Britain's favour. The forces of the allies crossed the channel and knocked the Germans out of France. They entered Italy. Mussolini flew for life but was killed. German resistance broke down under the pressure of a most destructive blitz. Hitler committed suicide. Japan remained at war till a year later. But two atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima brought it to its knees.

Lord Wavell who had acted as Commander-in-Chief was now appointed Viceroy. Wavell unexpectedly proved a man of greater understanding than Linlithgow. Within a short period he saw that politically the time had come for the British to "retreat" from India. In May, 1945, he proceeded to London to tender this advice to the Cabinet. In early June he returned to implement that advice. As a first step he ordered the release of Congress leaders and invited them, the leaders of the Muslim League and the representatives of other important parties to a conference in Simla. The Congress Working Committee had met in Bombay and deputed Maulana Azad to proceed to Simla to open discussions with the Viceroy. I arrived almost within a few hours of Maulana Azad to find that every available accommodation in the hotels had been requisitioned by the Government for the leaders. Maulana Azad had a suite reserved for him at the Cecil. The Viceroy, after meeting Azad, felt that he was in a state of health when he needed better food and greater comfort than was possible in a hotel. He invited him to stay at Armsdale. Thus his vacant suite became available to me. The Maulana felt amused when I told him that if the Viceroy had not invited him to Armsdale, I would be staying in some ramshackle place in Lower Bazar. "Remember the hard uneven floor of the barrack in the Central Jail of Delhi and the iron grill through which the loo⁶ came with particles of roasted dust and sand? Nothing could be worse than that." And then he looked at the garden, and the heavenly landscape beyond, and said, "Nothing could be better than this."

⁶ Hot winds.

After locking up the Congress in prison, Linlithgow and the reactionaries had done a lot of dirty work to strengthen Jinnah's position. They had brought within his reach rich resources of power and patronage, enabling him to distribute offices and benefits to his supporters. A political orphan of 1938, he became the favoured child of the bureaucracy in 1942. In the Frontier Province, with several of the Congress members of the legislature in prison, the Governor had convened the Assembly and put a Muslim League government in power. In Sind, Allah Bux was assassinated. His followers were sent to prison. Here again a Muslim League government with a precarious majority was installed. In Bengal, Fazlul Haq, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party, who had been head of a coalition, was forced to resign. Some of his Congress supporters being in prison, a Muslim League government with a minority to support it was put in office by the Governor. In Assam, the same game was repeated. Thus, by trickery and fraud, Jinnah and his followers were given power in five provinces. This in return brought to Jinnah lots of funds and influence. The League for the first time had members all over India. It had a private arsenal everywhere. Since officials took little notice of communal lawlessness engineered by the League, riots became a profitable source of booty to its goonda elements. Behind the League in many cities stood contingents of hooligans and hoodlums, wearing different uniforms.

Soon after his release, before the Simla Conference, Gandhi hoped that he could still win over Jinnah by appealing to his dormant sense of patriotism. He asked to meet him. Jinnah had lost all respect for Gandhi and openly said so. But he did want "recognition" of his leadership by the man who represented the soul and the spirit of Indian nationalism. Jinnah agreed to meet Gandhi at his Mount Pleasant residence. The interviews lasted several days. Jinnah gained by these interviews in publicity. Gandhi lost in prestige. They had met during the month of Ramzan—a month of fasting for the believers. Jinnah one day suddenly woke up to his forgotten religious obligations. He publicly declared that he and Gandhi were not meeting

on the 9th of September, which, being the last day of Ramzan, "good muslims have to observe". From the tenth to the twenty-seventh, except for a break to celebrate Id, or for Mondays which were Gandhi's days of silence, Gandhi trudged day after day to Jinnah's mansion, sometimes once, sometimes twice. I asked Gandhiji what they were discussing all these days. He replied he wanted to win back Jinnah to the concept of united India with a place of security, dignity and honour for the Muslims and other minorities. I asked Jinnah the same question. "Frankly", he said, "Gandhi wants me to accept the make-believe Pakistan of Rajagopalachari. I have tried to convince him that if he accepts the principle of Pakistan, then he should leave it to me to define Pakistan at the proper time." "But this could not have taken all this time," I said. "When two lawyers begin to hedge and argue they can never get to the point of decision," he said, "and we are both lawyers." Gandhi and he never reached the reality of things!

I never saw Gandhi more depressed or more completely checkmated than after the failure of the talks with Jinnah. In re-opening the thread of negotiations, he decided now to rely on Bulabhai Desai and Rajagopalachari since other leaders were in jail. Bulabhai Desai and Rajagopalachari were two of the most astute and outstanding brains in the Congress. But the two were completely different. Rajagopalachari was the victim of his own cleverness. He thought in circles and argued in spirals. In argument Rajagopalachari was a master quibbler. But as a negotiator he evoked more suspicion than confidence. Above all he lacked that generosity to friend or foe which made one likable even to those from whom one differed. He was a master in the use of language which could not only hurt but leave his victim mentally lacerated. Bulabhai, next to Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, was a man of outstanding ability, and consummate in the art of diplomacy. He was a man who could inspire confidence even among his opponents. Government representatives disliked his arguments, but they esteemed him personally. He had tact, a resourceful mind and a rare sense of realism. Where Gandhi and Rajagopalachari had failed, Bula-

bhai succeeded. He succeeded in breaking the deadlock, between the League and the Congress and the Congress and the Government, without involving either party in irreconcilable issues. His was at the time one of the greatest achievements of statesmanship. If things had gone the way Bulabhai had planned, Pakistan may have become a dead issue in due course and the Congress would have had an opportunity to prove to Muslims how their rights and interests could be protected in action, rather than merely on paper, in a united India.

At Bulabhai's advice Gandhi made to Linlithgow a last offer. The offer surprised most of us. What he had denounced in 1942 as morally wrong and politically unacceptable, he suddenly offered in 1944. He declared that "he would be satisfied with a national government in full control of the civil administration, composed of persons chosen by the elected members of the Assembly". Linlithgow left without attaching much importance ... Gandhi's offer. Wavell, his successor, was more realistic. He genuinely wanted to explore some effective method of breaking the deadlock.

It was at this time that Bulabhai Desai took the further initiative of negotiating with the League behind the scenes. Bulabhai saw that Gandhi's offer had cleared two boulders from the way. Gandhi had agreed to defer independence till the end of the war, and would be satisfied with the formation of a representative national executive "from among the elected members of the Central Assembly". Furthermore, he had assured that this government and the Congress representatives in it would "support the war effort". Hitherto negotiations had gone on between Gandhi and Jinnah. He by-passed both. He opened negotiations with Liaquat Ali Khan, the secretary of the Muslim League, its deputy leader in the Assembly, and the most powerful man behind Jinnah.

Liaquat Ali was a product of Oxford and the Inner Temple. He was, like Jinnah, a liberal-minded Muslim, a landlord by birth and politician by profession. He had been for nearly eight years the driving force behind Jinnah and the League, and had built up the status of both to raise his own stature in politics.

He was an eloquent speaker, tactful, amiable and convincing. While he had made Pakistan an issue even before Jinnah had thought of it, he considered it till then a means of bargaining for Muslim rights and privileges rather than an inevitable basis of any final settlement. Liaquat Ali was one of the few who knew that Jinnah was suffering from a fatal malady and did not have long to live. While, therefore, he shouted the loudest for Pakistan, he was prepared for some reasonable compromise which could bring power to the Muslim League and a key position for himself while Jinnah was still alive.

Bulabhai Desai and Liaquat were good friends. They met frequently in the Assembly. They evolved a formula for a National Executive Council from out of the existing members of the Assembly. For this evidently Liaquat had as much the blessings of Jinnah as Bulabhai Desai had of Gandhi. The Viceroy reacted favourably. According to the formula the Congress was to have four representatives, the League four, one depressed class's representative and one Sikh in the Executive Council. The formula by-passed by implication the demand for Pakistan, the Muslim League claim to sole representation of Muslims, and Britain's reluctance to hand over complete power before Hindu-Muslim differences could be settled. On the basis of this formula Wavell went to London for consultations. London reacted favourably also. On his return, Wavell issued an appeal inviting leaders of important parties to consider the idea of an Indian Executive Council in a more definite and concrete form. To make this possible, he ordered the release of all prominent Congressmen and called the conference at Simla.

23

“The Murder” of Bulabhai

Simla's formal life was suddenly disturbed. The Conference was like a political *mela*. In addition to those invited, Simla attracted thousands of fun-seekers, hangers-on and mere observers. After Abul Kalam, the President, arrived Jinnah, followed by few hundred Muslim Leaguers from all parts of the country. Then followed the Congress cavalcade. Jinnah had been to Simla a hundred times. According to routine, he arrived by rail motor, and then reached the Cecil by rickshaw. Gandhi arrived by car on an unannounced schedule because of weak health, with his usual retinue of thirty odd *khadi*-clad disciples. He drove straight to the mansion of Raja Harnam Singh, negotiable directly from the Cart Road. Nehru, however, stole the show. His fifty-two mile car route to Simla was lined by thousands of people who cheered Nehru's car as it passed, loading it with flowers. Thousands crowded the roads at Simla when he arrived. As Jinnah watched the scene from his Cecil Hotel window, he felt nauseated. He felt even worse when Nehru's car, contrary to the official ban, drove past the Cecil. It upset him further to know that a Muslim, Abul Kalam Azad, an erstwhile rebel, had been lodged as the Viceroy's guest, while he, the “Qaid-e-Azam”, had to find a hotel room for himself and ride a very plebeian rickshaw. Small things sometimes influence great decisions. It became obvious to some of us who then watched Jinnah that he would not hit off well with Wavell. Protocol had spiked the Simla Conference. Jinnah's pride had been hurt. He was on the war path.

The pampered child of the British bureaucracy had also political reasons for feeling upset. In his broadcast inviting the Conference Wavell had said nothing about the League demand for Pakistan. Wavell had assured that the Hindus and Muslims will have parity in the Central Executive, as suggested in the Bulabhai-Liaquat Pact, and that his idea was to select the "best and most homogenous team" from a panel of names to be supplied to him. He had not even specified the role of the Muslim League in determining the Muslim personnel. As a final homethrust he had concluded by expressing his belief "in the future of India" and of "doing his best to further 'her' greatness". Jinnah noticed that of the twenty-one leaders invited besides himself and Gandhi, one as "head" of the Congress and the other as "head" of the League, the Viceroy had under one head or another included other Muslims who did not belong to the League, such as Khizr Hyat Tiwana, leader of the Unionist Party of the Punjab, Dr Khan Sahib, Chief Minister of the Frontier Province, Fazlul Haq, head of the Praja Krishak Party of Bengal, etc. Jinnah had been also feeling that unlike Linlithgow who had helped to build up Jinnah's house of cards, Wavell had done nothing to save it from crumbling down.

In the North Western Frontier Province, after the release of Congress leaders, the Muslim League Ministry was voted out of office. The Congress Ministry with a solid majority had been installed. Sir Francis Wylie, the Governor, was reported to be actively flirting with the Khan brothers and the Red Shirts. In Bengal, the Muslim League Ministry which had a tenuous majority had been defeated. Governor's rule had been imposed. In Assam, Sir Saidullah, though owing allegiance to the League, took orders from the Congress Party whose support alone was keeping him in office. In Sind, Sir Hidayat Ullah, though nominally loyal to the League, had been playing musical chairs, changing parties and loyalties every few months. He now depended on Congress support to remain in office. Khizr Hayat (Unionist) ruled Punjab but refused to join the Muslim League.

Jinnah's first act of sabotage, therefore, was to repudiate the

Bulabhai-Liaquat Pact. He blatantly declared that he knew nothing about it, and was no party to it. It was unbelievable! The negotiations between Liaquat Ali and Bulabhai had been going on for days in the lobby of the Assembly, where Jinnah was always present. The negotiations had been "secret" but public enough to be mentioned in newspapers, discussed by journalists and politicians alike. They could not have proceeded for a day if Gandhi and Jinnah had not been consulted. In the "secret" consultations a stage had been reached when the Viceroy wanted to know whether Jinnah would like to serve on the new Executive with Bulabhai Desai, or he would prefer to nominate Liaquat Ali Khan. Jinnah had kept the option. Being an astute politician, Jinnah now felt that by pleading ignorance of the pact he was neither repudiating nor accepting it. Wavell was shocked! Wavell, above everything, was a man of integrity. Like a true soldier he believed in straightforward dealings.

My relations with Liaquat Ali were very close. During the Simla Conference we were thrown even closer together. Bulabhai said that if Jinnah had not been consulted by Liaquat during the negotiations, Liaquat had not spoken to him the truth. He also added that if he had to chose between the two, he would rather believe Liaquat. I quizzed Liaquat several times in different ways to find out the truth. I can only say that Liaquat felt as much shocked by the denial of his leader as any one else. "In politics everything goes," he would say. and leave it at that. A month later he published a very equivocal explanation. It was widely believed that it had been done "to save the face of his leader".

A further disappointment was in store for Jinnah. Gandhi, even though invited, excused himself from attending the Conference, but assured Wavell that he would be available for consultations. Thus not Gandhi but Abul Kalam Azad, "the Congress President", and a "Muslim" at that, became the Congress counterpart of Jinnah. Jinnah considered this a cunning device on the part of Gandhi. Before the Conference started, all the invitees were made to assemble on the terrace of the Vice-

regal Lodge. Jinnah caustically remarked: "Have we come here for a horse show or have we come for serious business?" He specially disliked a chair being offered to Azad, who had pleaded ill-health. "If he is unwell," Jinnah remarked, "he should be in hospital". To Jinnah's surprise, at a moment's notice, all assembled were requested to form into a row to be introduced to the Viceroy. While the suggestion had no obvious reference to protocol, it did happen that Azad was the first to be introduced. Jinnah, who had accidentally taken third place, petulantly moved down the row to place himself near the end of the line. This did not go unnoticed. As he shook hands with the Viceroy, a shorter man, he continued to look beyond him, towards the skies. This also did not go unnoticed. Jinnah was a born actor, and even in small gestures he could be terribly rude!

If the Congress leaders on their part had shown prudence, patience, tact and a little generosity between themselves, the Simla Conference offered them a great opportunity to checkmate Jinnah. The Bulabhai-Liaquat pact signalled a wonderful breakthrough so far as the communal deadlock was concerned. If the Congress leaders had adhered to it, with Wavell's support and Liaquat's help there was every chance of its being fully implemented. But selfish reasons weighed as much with Jinnah as with top Congress leaders.

The Congress Working Committee met in Bombay in early June to consider the Viceroy's invitation and the Pact. The Bombay discussions revealed however that the Congress attitude towards these well-considered and cleverly formulated proposals began to be seriously influenced by personal and selfish considerations. The Bulabhai-Liaquat plan, for good reasons, envisaged an interim arrangement whereby the Executive Council was to be representative of different sections and parties "in the Indian Legislature", as it was then constituted. It also specifically stated that "there would be no general election either at the Centre or in the provinces". The first condition by-passed the demand for Pakistan, without in any way prejudicing it, and the second the issue of "independence", without

prejudicing the same. It was felt by Bulabhai Desai, Liaquat Ali Khan and the Viceroy that if the proposed arrangement worked successfully, and some of the fears of the Muslims and other minorities were allayed, the way may be paved sooner than later for a further bold step towards fuller freedom for an "united" rather than a "divided" India. Both parties saw things from different angles and agreed for reasons of self-interest. Liaquat realized that unlike Linlithgow, Wavell was not inclined to support the separatist demands of the League. Besides, even Linlithgow had encouraged these demands only to suit the exigencies of war, which no longer existed. If there was a general election, the League might lose even the little hold it now exercised in Sind, Assam and Bengal, and reduce its strength in the country and the Central Legislature. Bulabhai read the situation differently. With the League having considerably gained in following since 1942, whether through Government help or appeal to communal passions, there was little chance of reducing the League's strength in the Central Legislature in any general election. It was a gamble not worth the stakes.

If the proposals were accepted, it followed that Desai and Jinnah (the then leaders of the Congress party and the League in the Assembly) would be invited to form an interim government at the Centre. The proposals further ran: "They would then consult the groups in the Indian Legislature and submit names to the Governor-General for inclusion in the Executive Council." In expressing his public approval of the proposals Gandhi had carefully seen through all the subtle considerations that had gone into their formulation and which had contributed to their acceptance by Liaquat. Bulabhai hoped that Gandhiji would be their staunchest champion in the Working Committee. He suddenly found Gandhiji concerned more with the flaws than with the advantages. In the Working Committee the proposals were not considered on merit but in the light of personal ambitions. Key men in the High Command suddenly realized that, if the proposals were adopted, then, in the Centre and in the Provinces, important ministerial positions would

have to be filled only from amongst existing members. The provincial pattern of 1937 needed vital changes since several provincial leaders had gained and several had lost the High Command's favour. A re-shuffle would be difficult if the existing composition of the legislatures remained unaltered. In the Centre, a new Executive Council would in effect mean setting the pattern of a new Central Government. Those joining it would have considerable power. They might remain in power till a final step towards independence was taken. This may be a year or ten years.

Abul Kalam Azad, as the Congress President, and a Muslim at that, naturally entertained the vague feeling that if the choice of leadership was not confined to the existing members of the Assembly, he may be the logical number one on behalf of the Congress. Sardar Patel, the head of the Congress Parliamentary Board, felt that in the changed conditions he would be the appropriate person to lead the Congress at the Centre. Nehru, as the chosen successor to Gandhi, and by all considerations the fittest and most popular choice to head the Central Government, also felt that the choice of leader should not be confined to the existing members of the Assembly. Thus by common consent, though for diverse "private" reasons, Bulabhai from a hero became the *hetc noir* of his Congress colleagues. The valid and vital reasons that required the initial choice to be confined to Bulabhai Desai and Jinnah, were neither taken into account nor appreciated. In an effort to give calculated meanness a cloak of righteousness, Bulabhai was accused of negotiating the pact, not for resolving a serious deadlock, but to ensure for himself the position of leader of the Executive by the back door. It was a foul libel. As in the case of Nariman and Subhash Bose, a man to whom posterity would have attributed one of the greatest achievements of constructive statesmanship was maliciously accused of personal motives. He was made the victim of a most uncalled-for, mean and malevolent campaign of character assassination.

Bulabhai, the architect of the proposals, suddenly found that he had neither friends nor admirers and all around him were

only accusers. I found him, as I had earlier found Subhash after the Calcutta meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, a most unhappy man. During the Simla Conference, he was not even consulted when his advice was most needed. The tragedy was heightened when the Congress submitted its list of nominees to the Executive Council to the Viceroy. Bulabhai's name, which stood first in the Pact, was omitted. When he approached Gandhiji for an explanation, he was blandly told that there had been reports that he was "accustomed to drinking". To many of us it came as a surprise that Gandhiji, who had knowingly tolerated drinking in many of the top leaders of the Congress for years, should have suddenly invoked this charge to justify a gross injustice to Bulabhai. If indulgence in alcohol was an offence, argued Bulabhai, Motilal had been thrice elected President of the Congress while openly admitting that he was not a tee-totaller. It was well known that some members of the Working Committee, quite a few provincial Ministers, Congress members of the Legislature, and many members of the AICC freely indulged in drinking. Gandhiji was certainly not unaware of it. Bulabhai said he had played host to the Congress President who was as much of a tee-totaller as he was. When Gandhiji asked Maulana Azad if the allegation was true, he said nothing. The question was unnecessary, since Gandhiji was well aware of the Maulana's addiction to alcohol and of several others. Shocked by these tactics and utterly disillusioned as to the political ethics of his accusers, Bulabhai felt terribly depressed. One day when the negotiations had reached a deadlock, he said to me, with tears in his eyes, that he had been condemned by the highest without a hearing, and that his proposals had been stupidly sabotaged by the very people in whose interests they had been framed!

Despite his detractors, Bulabhai, whose strength lay in ability and not in intrigue, later again became a national hero. He volunteered to defend the officers of the Indian National Army charged with waging war and high treason before a martial law tribunal. The brilliant manner in which he conducted the defence before the martial law tribunal reminded

a score of eminent lawyers and ex-judges associated with him of Birkenhead and Simon. For hours, extending to nearly four days, he argued, almost without notes, keeping the members of the Tribunal and the visitors spell-bound. For the first time since he relinquished practice, even Nehru borrowed a barrister's gown to join the legal luminaries assisting Bulabhai in the defence. It was one of the greatest trials of history, and Bulabhai's was voted by one and all a grand and historic performance. Even after this, instead of honouring the greatest advocate of his time, a fine patriot and a most capable statesman, the High Command added meanness to calumny. To insure that Bulabhai was kept out as a potential rival, when lists were prepared for a later election he was not even named a Congress candidate. No explanation was offered. No excuse given. This gross injustice, and grosser ingratitude on the part of his colleagues, proved unbearable. Bulabhai died soon afterwards of a heart attack.

The Conference which had been called to create an interim representative Executive Council as an initial step to full freedom met only twice for sessions lasting more than an hour. First, on the day of its birth, the 26th of June, 1944. Last, on July 14 to proclaim its death and for the performance of formal obsequies. Since the Congress and the League were now meeting as national parties and not as parties in the legislatures, Jinnah insisted that no Muslim should be nominated to the executive by the Congress even though its President happened to be an eminent Muslim, and none substituted by the Viceroy. The Viceroy wanted to nominate Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, head of the Unionist Party, for very obvious reasons. Jinnah refused. Many things were however happening behind the scenes, of which at the time no public notice could be taken. Actually Jinnah's attitude was now dictated, not from strength, but from weakness. He made several private attempts to cajole, persuade and finally browbeat Khizr Hayat into joining the League. Khizr refused to be drawn into any argument and pleaded that he was essentially a "simple rustic", and he could not wear two masks at one time. He

could not be in the League and yet head the Unionist Party. Jinnah's difficulty was not only Khizr. His executive was so full of job-seekers, knights and Nawabs, that once he made up his list he was likely to offend those he did not include. The Executive of the League in secret session left it to Jinnah to prepare a list and hand over the same to the Viceroy. He made it known that he had done so. He bluffed both the Viceroy and the Executive ! He never made out a list and presented none to the Viceroy. The Viceroy made out his own list from among the League leaders, which included Jinnah.

As time passed, with the Bulabhai Pact out of the way, enthusiasm in the Congress Camp for the success of the Conference suddenly increased. Three years of imprisonment had wrecked many constitutions. Age was catching on fast so far as some of the prominent leaders were concerned. In the beginning they wanted nothing less than the full loaf. They were now prepared for half the loaf, in the hope that full independence would not be long in coming. In the beginning they had apprehensions and doubts about Wavell. But after he had met some of them in Simla they began to trust him. Even Gandhi considered him a real friend. Azad swore by him ! The Congress sent him its panel of names and was liberal enough to make the list comprehensive and "all-embracing". In private negotiations they made some generous offers even to Jinnah and the League.

Govind Ballabh Pant was delegated to open the negotiations. He was a very wrong choice. Worse than Azad. He was selected because he had humility, which some top leaders lacked. But Govind Ballabh Pant had been the Chief Minister of the United Provinces in 1937. Azad and the Congress were accused of breach of faith by Jinnah and the Muslim League, in not keeping to an alleged promise to include two representatives of the League to form a Coalition Cabinet in UP. Thus the Jinnah-Pant negotiations opened in a spirit of distrust and ended in frustration. At this stage I suggested to Nehru to step into the negotiations himself as Jinnah and other Muslim League leaders still trusted him. He reluctantly agreed.

I took the preliminary step of inviting several guests to dinner, including among them Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan. By their mutual consent I shifted guests and chairs in such a manner that the two finally sat close to each other. I was surprised, and so were the guests, to notice how much they needed to talk. This tête-à-tête convinced Nehru that Jinnah would welcome a meeting if such a meeting were tactfully arranged without loss of pride on either side.

A meeting between two snobs when many eyes are always turned on their movements became a difficult task. It was customary for Jinnah to come out of his room after breakfast and sit in a raised corner of the foyer of the Cecil, greeting everyone he knew, or just silently watching people coming in or going out. Nehru had never stepped into the Cecil, except only once for my dinner. It happened that his sister was arriving the next day. No accommodation was available in the hotel. The proprietor¹ offered the use of one of his office-rooms for the period of her stay. Before accepting the offer, I suggested to Nehru that it may be desirable for him to "inspect the accommodation". Nehru agreed. "Could you arrive punctually between 10 and 10.30?" I requested. Nehru flared up. "Nonsense," he said. "Why can't I drop in at any time? After all the office will still be there." "It is not always good to ask many questions," I interposed smilingly. Nehru understood. Jinnah came out as usual. But in order not to take any chances, Liaquat who was in the secret moved up to him and engaged him in live conversation. Nehru was dead punctual. To heighten the casualness of the coincidence we first went to the proprietor's office, and then slowly proceeded towards my room. As the two got nearer, both, as good actors, gave a grin of recognition, as if awakened to each other's unexpected presence with surprise. A cordial shaking of the hands followed. Nehru explained his mission. Jinnah equally casually asked if Nehru would like to have a cup of coffee in Jinnah's room. Nehru agreed. The "casual" meeting ended at 1.30 p.m.

¹ Mr M. S. Oberoi.

I asked Nehru afterwards if he had made any dent in Jinnah's armour. "I am afraid it is too late," he said. "He is more opposed to Wavell nominating Khizr than the Congress nominating Azad. I doubt if even Jinnah fully understands what Mr Jinnah wants." "Perhaps Sir Francis Mudie does," I remarked in an under-breath. While Nehru was disappointed, he was now willing to make the most generous concessions to win Muslim opinion both inside and outside the League. Vallabhbhai Patel and his supporters in the Congress had by now got reconciled to Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. "If Jinnah wants Pakistan," Vallabhbhai, according to Dr Khan Sahib, was believed to have said at this time, "let him have it. Let him take with him those Muslims who want to join him in his new heaven, and also all the Muslim goondas, pimps and prostitutes."² When I met Dr Khan Sahib in the hotel, he was terribly upset. How could any Congress leader, he said, think, least of all talk, of Pakistan when a Congress government still ruled in the Frontier.

Patel explained later that, even if Pakistan was accepted in principle, only those areas in which Muslims were in a majority, and which decided to form a separate State, would go to Pakistan. If the Frontier decided to remain with India, it was already connected with India through Kashmir, so it would remain part of the main subcontinent. Nobody, including Jinnah, however had any clear idea as to what would constitute Pakistan, and how independent and sovereign India and Pakistan would be of each other, if and when a division was decided upon, and how Hindu or Muslim rulers and their States and people would fit into the new picture. It was anybody's guess!

² I may state here that the dancing women in Northern India were generally Muslims, although in other parts of the country the communities were equally represented in the profession.

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The Puppets Rebel

"The puppets have walked out of the show," said my reporter as I was rushing through the corridors to attend the annual session of the Princes' Chamber. "Sir," he said, "believe it or not, the worms have turned. This spells the end of the British in India." It was unbelievable, but true. The annual meeting of the Chamber had been called for the 4th of December. On September 15, 1944, the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes had passed a resolution expressing "grave misgivings and apprehensions" about the future relationship with the Crown, and wanting an assurance that their "treaty rights shall remain unimpaired" and that this relationship "cannot and should not be transferred to any third party" without the consent of the States concerned. While negotiations were going on between the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, the Congress and the League, the Princes felt that without being consulted, or without their consent, their existing relationship with the "Paramount Power" should not be transferred to the new government of a free India, or of Pakistan. When the Chamber met, the Viceroy disallowed the resolution. The Princes walked out. So did the Viceroy. The Standing Committee of the Princes sent in their resignation. Eighty princes then met non-officially under the Presidentship of the Maharaja of Gwalior and unanimously endorsed the resolution passed by the Standing Committee. I never saw the princes, who were hitherto known as a set of profligate poltroons, so excited and so determined to assert their "rights".

Two decades had changed the Princely Order considerably. In the old days they arrived in expensive cars with a colourful retinue of attendants and aides, and a loadful of concubines. They hired palatial bungalows at exorbitant rents. Pimps, prostitutes and dancing women did a roaring business. So did jewellers, drapers and suppliers of expensive saris. Majestic Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, with his hundred-odd wives, Alwar, known for his colourful Rolls Royces and notorious for whipping favourite women and horses alike, Ganga Singh of Bikaner with his aristocratic whiskers, his camel battery and his carpet of wild grouse, Ranji, the champion cricketer and the collector of rare carpets, had all disappeared, leaving behind myths and fables of their imperious ways and princely extravagance. Most of the princes of the new generation still lived expensively by common standards, but instances of wasteful extravagance were rare. Although some of the rulers had built palatial houses in the capital, most of them had been requisitioned during the war. By and large the new generation preferred to stay in hotels. They found greater entertainment at less expenditure in the company of pleasure-seeking WACCs than in a harem of concubines, in dancing to the Rhumba and the Fox Trot than in watching Kathak and Oddissi by traditional professionals. Many had married modern, educated, cultured girls who introduced mixed parties and gave a new orientation to the social life of the Order.

Jayaji Rao Scindia assumed rulership of Gwalior in his early twenties. He found the hundred-room palace with its mammoth halls and marble corridors too large, the fifty-odd elephants an extravagance, and the mini-train his father rode in for pleasure an expensive toy. He moved his personal secretariat into the palace, and shifted himself into a "modest" three-storied, twenty-roomed mansion in the neighbourhood. He reduced the number of elephants, but increased the number of horses. According to some, his winnings on the race course almost paid for the stables and fresh replacements. The mini-train was commercialized and in a decade paid not only the original outlay, but also a recurring profit. He married a

Deputy Collector's daughter, a girl of sound education and refinement, with whom he fell in love at first sight, instead of seeking a bride from the princely order. Sadul Singh of Bikaner was neither brilliant nor an exhibitionist like his father. At the same time he was not as lavish or as extravagant in personal expenditure. He started building up the State from where his father left off, and cutting down expenditure where his father had begun.

Yadavender Singh of Patiala seemed an unsophisticated plebeian in the presence of the imperious Bhupender Singh, his father. He had inherited from his father a love for sports, especially cricket, but not his weakness for mobilising a harem. When Bhupender Singh died, the first concern of the new Maharaja was to dispose off the harem, along with elephants, horses, dogs and an army of hangers-on. His father ran five guest-houses, and they were always full. Guests remembered to come and forgot to leave. Yadavender Singh maintained only one guest-house, and so quickly disposed off the guests that they had difficulty finding an excuse for a second meal.

As "elders" to this younger generation emerged two outstanding personalities, who in turn served as Chancellors of the Chamber of Princes after the disappearance of the old guard. They were the Jam Sahib of Nawanager and the Nawab of Bhopal. Both had been reared in the hard school of life, and not in the soft pampering atmosphere of palaces. Until his uncle Ranji died and willed him as his successor, Jam Sahib never imagined that he would become a ruler. He was then a Colonel in the Indian Army, living a rugged life in the North-West Frontier, where for political reasons wars were arranged overnight and peace was purchased within the hour. In his spare time he bought Teheran and Bokhara carpets at low prices from tribal peddlers, and sold them at high prices to his princely friends and "patrons", keeping the best for himself. Six feet tall, almost elephantine in build, Jam Sahib loved good food with the gusto of a gourmet and an atmosphere of elegance. He had spent his student days at Cambridge. He was well informed, versatile and tactful. He had all the makings of

a politican, the constructive approach of a statesman, and the finesse of a born diplomat. He was a gifted speaker. He preserved a dignity, which attracted respect, coupled with a frankness which induced confidence. He had a great sense of humour and had a rich fund of stories drawn both from army life and the princely order.

The Nawab of Bhopal was a Pathan by birth and a prince by adoption. He succeeded his aunt who ruled over Bhopal for nearly three decades and died without naming a successor. Educated at Aligarh and by private tutors in England, he was neither conservative in enforcing sex segregation too strictly in the palace, nor liberal enough to allow the same freedom to women as some of the other princes like Gwalior, Patiala, Jaipur or the Jam Sahib. Life in the harem was fairly gay, but was the exclusive privilege of the ruler and some of his intimate relations and attendants. Outside the harem he lived the life of a British country gentleman. He was of medium build, sturdy and athletic. He was a man of rare commonsense and remarkable tact—the type whose right hand need never know what the left hand did. It was this remarkable quality that enabled him, the first Muslim prince, to be elected more than once to be Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, of which ninety per cent were Hindus. He had the confidence of Gandhi and Nehru and at the same time was hand in glove with Jinnah. A stage had been reached when no one knew whether he was acting on behalf of Gandhi and Nehru to influence Jinnah to return to nationalism, or was working with Jinnah to strengthen the Muslim League and sabotage the plans of the Congress.

It was during this transitional period in 1944 that I spent a few days with him. During the fifteen-odd years since he assumed rulership, Bhopal had not materially improved the economic condition of his people, but as a show-piece he had built up a picturesque modern township overlooking the lake. The township offered a telling contrast to the sprawling old city with its rickety homes, narrow streets, and still narrower lanes stinking with the smell of open drains and mounds of

accumulated garbage. This was the story not only of Bhopal but of many other Indian States, where rulers had moved into new modern colonies built for themselves, leaving the general populace in congested, dilapidated old cities with primitive sanitary conditions and low economic standards.

With Bhopal the *hukka* was a bit of a ritual. He smoked the *hukka* with a gusto that few lovers of Lady Nicotine could match. The *hukka* was not only brought before and after dinner, but almost followed him wherever he went. Even on the race course I saw Bhopal and the *hukka* moving together, the attendant keeping pace with the gurgling sounds. It was only when we were on a shoot that the *hukka* was not in evidence. I was told that even the gurgling sound of a *hukka* was enough to scare away a tiger. We were staying at his picturesque hunting lodge¹, and had gone deep into the jungle, myself shooting the scene with my camera, and my companions shooting birds and big game with their rifles. As we were returning, the car broke an axle on a bump in the road. The follow-up car was expected to leave the lodge after an hour. Meanwhile, a bullock-cart passed by. "Would you like to ride a bullock-cart or walk till the car is repaired or the follow-up car arrives?" asked Bhopal. I expressed no preferences, but His Highness suggested we enjoy a ride in the bullock-cart, an experience rare in the life of both of us. The Nawab was dressed in a *shikari's* breeches and an open shirt, while I was wearing conventional *khadi*. His Highness warned me not to reveal his identity to the cartman, which I would not have done in any case. As we were getting into the cart, the cartman suggested that we take a gun along since the jungle road was not altogether safe. As the Nawab went to get a gun from the car, the cartman asked me who my companion was. I told him that he was one of the Nawab's *shikaris*.² When we had settled down to the heavy joltings of the slow cart, I asked the cartman how he managed to negotiate the jungle without a gun. "There is always a risk," he said, "but the beasts do not molest us. They just pass by."

¹ In Chiklot.

² Game Hunters.

But, sir," he added, "they can smell a *shikari*. And when they see one, they are likely to attack in self-defence." At this naïve remark we both gave a good laugh. The cartman could not understand whether we approved or disapproved of what he had said. In his churlish frankness, he continued: "Sir, it might be rude to say so, but I assure you we would rather have the beasts than the *shikaris*. For maintaining a few *shikaris* in employment and for the vicarious pleasure of enjoying a shoot once in a while, His Highness is losing millions, and the people are getting poorer and poorer."

I almost wanted to change the topic, when the Nawab asked him how he came to such a conclusion, and why he was so much against *shikaris*. "You *shikaris*," he said, "come for a day or two with His Highness, but leave the beasts scared and angry. They just go mad afterwards for weeks." But that, he said, was comparatively a small matter. "This is not just a jungle," he said, pointing to rows and rows of broad-leaved trees. "Here is miles and miles of the finest timber. It is a gold mine, if only His Highness preferred to sell the timber, rather than preserve the jungle." For the first time I looked closely at the trees. I saw some of the finest teak growing for miles around. Before the cartman could impart more of his rustic wisdom, our car had overtaken us. His Highness handed the cartman a hundred-rupee note and thanked him for offering us the ride and his advice. "But you are the Nawab Sahib, sir, Alijah. I have been a fool talking nonsense like this," and he fell flat on the ground in obeisance. "How do you know," asked the Nawab. "No *shikari* would give me even a rupee for riding in my bullock-cart!"

Bhopal at this time was working on a plan of Confederation. The confederate areas were to consist of groups of small and big States pooled together with provinces with Muslim majorities and Hindu minorities, all sovereign in their internal affairs, except foreign affairs, defence and communications. This was, however, for the consumption of the Congress and the Princes. To Jinnah, privately, he had sold the idea of not one but two confederations. One of groups of States whose

rulers could be offered better terms than the Congress could offer, and who could either by sea or land create a common border to confederate with Pakistan, the rest to confederate with India or remain independent, as they liked.

According to this scheme, Hyderabad, a Hindu State with a Muslim ruler could be brought into the Pakistan confederation, either by getting an opening to the sea to the harbour of Masulipatnam, or, if India remained obdurate, by negotiating with the Portuguese for an opening through Goa. Kashmir had a Hindu ruler with a majority of Muslims. He could be coerced through local agitation to join Pakistan rather than India. Bhopal was insular, with a dominant Hindu population. The whole plan of the Nawab impinged on his ability to win over a whole group of big and small States, lying between Bhopal and Junagadh, which offered an opening to the sea.

Bhopal approached the Jam Sahib and others with his secret plan of grouping together western States with a possible connection with Bhopal. The shrewd Jam Sahib at once saw through the plan. When I divulged the plan to Nehru, he just dismissed it as a day-dream. So I arranged a meeting between Sardar Patel, Jam Sahib, Patiala, Gwalior and Baldev Singh.³ Patel, the realist, quickly saw through the sinister plan, and asked the Jam Sahib and others to help destroy it. "You manage your friends in the big States, and leave the smaller States to me," said the Sardar. He was a man of few words but firm decisions.

India had a total of five hundred States. Of these only eighty or ninety were substantial and of these less than three dozens could be called major. When I published a few days later the outlines of the Bhopal-Jinnah plan, there was a great commotion among the princes—especially the rulers of the smaller States. One saw the hand of the Sardar, when the States met separately, to consider their special problems, thereby repudiating indirectly the leadership of Bhopal. They expressed the fear that they were likely either to be ignored, or absorbed by the bigger States. The bigger States realized that a stage had been reached when they should negotiate directly with leaders of

³ They met secretly at my house.

Indian opinion, instead of leaving it to the Viceroy or to Bhopal. Bhopal had hitherto reserved to himself the right of conducting all negotiations, but actually he had been running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. Despite Bhopal's opposition this decision was carried. Bhopal resigned as Chancellor in protest. He expected the princes to express regret and to persuade him in the usual princely manner to withdraw his resignation. To his surprise, the resignation was accepted. Yadavender Singh of Patiala, the pro-Chancellor, was elected Chancellor instead.

This came as a shock to Jinnah who had banked so much on the consummation of a plan which had enlarged the concept of Pakistan to cover more than one-third of the area of India. The princes, the ministers, the leaders of the States' Peoples' Conference, all in their own way, had now entered the field of political negotiations with Indian leaders.

25

Wedding Bells Chime Farewell!

My visits to the race course were rare. My interest in horses and races casual. The race course in Delhi was no more than a track with improvised brick enclosures for the stewards and the elite. The Viceroy visited it only on festive occasions. The patron saint here was the Commander-in-Chief. The horses plied during week days pulling guns, army trucks or tongas. On Saturdays they competed in races. Tote windows faced both sides of the enclosure, thereby permitting chauffeurs, butlers, and batman to bet without paying an entrance fee.

A bearded butler in a golden sash was telling the two juniors around him to buy "win" for No. 6 and "place" for No. 3, the latter being the horse ridden by a smart army officer. No. 6 was a tall, heavy gelding which seemed to have pulled at guns in the Remount Depot and been borrowed for the race. The rider was also a tall, heavy girl who was having a hard time keeping control of the horse. The bearded butler was challenged by the doubters. "Look at that camel and that lady who looks as if she will fall off, if the horse gets into a canter." "This is Delhi!" he said. "A few years ago, the Nizam Bahadur was here on one of his rare visits. He came to the race course as the guest of the Viceroy. He had been sitting listlessly through every race, till his ADC drew his attention to the race in which the Viceroy's own horse was listed. The Nizam loudly gave the name of the Viceroy's horse to the ADC, but in a whisper asked him to buy a dozen tickets for "place".

"As it happened the Viceroy's horse got 'place', but did not win. The Nizam explained to the perplexed ADC as he received his winnings: 'The horse was in no shape to win. But it belonged to the Viceroy. So I felt certain it would get 'place'. If I had betted on 'win' I would have risked my money and my reputation as a good judge of horses. But now we have pleased the Viceroy, we get our money back, and no one can say I am a bad judge of horses'." I liked the story and the way the bearded veteran told it. In between sentences he sprouted mouthfuls of betel juice on the tote window. "This now is the amateur's race," he continued. "They have not given her name," he said confidentially. "But she is Lord Wavell's daughter. Believe me, horse or no horse, rider or no rider, the smart major is only there to ensure she wins. You will see, she will." The heavy girl on the big heavy horse did win, and I got more than my money's worth, enhancing my reputation as a good judge of "horses".

Miss Wavell suddenly assumed importance in Lord Wavell's unpredictable career when he became Viceroy. Her romance became unexpectedly entangled in the web of Indian politics. She fell in love with one of the aides of the Viceroy. Whether he was the same army officer who insured her win a few years earlier or someone else, I wouldn't know. This was August, 1946. Wavell's Viceroyalty of five years had another three years to go. The Cabinet Mission, after prolonged negotiations and juggling with words and formulae to appease Jinnah on the one hand and satisfy the Congress on the other, had ended with a declaration¹ which neither party could easily reject nor wholly accept. Every sentence in it had a double meaning, every paragraph was couched in confusion, and the declaration as a whole had a vagueness which only the skill and the cleverness of the British could devise. The declaration was meant to cover more than it revealed. It was so framed that Jinnah could see in it his unfolding picture of "Pakistan"; Abul Kalam Azad felt as if he himself was its "author". Only, it better expressed in English what he had advocated in the

¹ On May 16th.

vernacular. Nehru and Patel thought it was not the whole bread they had ordered, but a substantial part of it to offer satisfaction.

The declaration had two parts. The first called for the setting-up of an interim government. The second laid down the procedure for the election of representatives to the Constituent Assembly. It divided the existing provinces into three groups: Group A to consist of provinces with a Hindu majority; Group B to include provinces like North-Western Frontier, Sind, Baluchistan and the Punjab; Group C to consist of Bengal and Assam. After the preliminary meeting of the constitution-framing body, the representatives of the provinces were to meet in their respective sections. The sections were to draw up the respective constitutions for each. As a middle-tier the plan provided that such sections as so decided could form, with other sections so willing, groups to formulate group constitutions. A province could if it so desired opt out of the group to which it belonged. No province, however, or section could secede from the union for the first ten years. The Indian States were to join the Union at the top in the same manner, and retain residuary powers like the other provinces, with option to form groups between themselves.

Nehru did not like the three-tier arrangement, nor the undue emphasis on communal majority and minority areas. But the fact that the British had finally accepted the idea of a sovereign Constituent Assembly appealed to him.

Gandhi alone saw that the seemingly good apple was rotten at the core. Left to himself, Gandhi would have rejected the Cabinet Mission's offer, if the British could only just quit. But he found his colleagues eager to snatch power and prepared for compromises.

Nehru presided over the AICC meeting in Bombay. The AICC decided to accept both the short-term and the long-range plan contained in the May 16 declaration. Jinnah and the Council of the Muslim League had already done so. Both parties interpreted the "grouping" part of the declaration in their own way, without challenging the interpretation of the

other. Lord Wavell invited Nehru as head of the Congress Party to form an interim government with the League, if possible. Unlike the Congress leaders, Jinnah had read the declaration correctly, and its very clear meaning that the initial grouping was to be "compulsory". Withdrawal from it could only be by a majority vote of the section and not a province. He therefore felt sure that the Congress would reject the declaration. In that case the Viceroy would have no option but to invite the League to form an interim government. Jinnah pleaded that the Congress had not endorsed in all its implications the May 16 offer. The League only had, and therefore should have been invited to form the interim government. Wavell seemed unobliging. Hence the League decided to reject the offer to join the interim government. It went further and fixed August 16 as "Direct Action" day. Wavell never expected Jinnah to take such a desperate step. Having invited Nehru, he rushed a messenger to recall the invitation. It was too late. Nehru had received the communication and written back accepting the offer.

Miss Wavell's marriage was duly fixed for some time in March, 1947. The event was in a way to be historic. It was the first marriage of a Viceroy's daughter to be celebrated during his Viceroyalty, and in India. No time was lost in sending out invitations to guests who included top politicians, rich princes, big landlords, talukdars, businessmen and industrialists. To the select even a suggestive list of presents Miss Wavell "would appreciate", with prices and where they could be procured, was discreetly sent by one of the aides, seemingly trying to be helpful "on his own". As the date of the wedding drew near, Wavell found politics taking twists and turns too complicated for his age and his army background.

It was the morning of September 2, 1946. Gandhi had risen very early. This day the Congress Cabinet had to be sworn in. Gandhi was staying in what had then come to be euphemistically known the "Bhangi Colony". Firstly, it was hardly a colony. Secondly, it was very unlike Gandhi to call a spade a spade where the sweepers and the scavengers were concerned.

To him they were "Harijans", the children of God. In planning the new capital, Lutyens² had never thought of them! Driving down Punchkuin Road, if you turned left behind the Talkatora police station, you entered a small lane. In this, these men with their dark, dirty, foul-smelling carts, their bony oxen, their shrivelled, half-naked wives and children, crowded together in improvised shelters—the lowliest among the homeless, in the garden city of New Delhi.

Gandhi had often surprised friends and shocked his critics, by changing abodes, alternating between palaces of plutocrats and the mud huts of the peasants. Birla House, a spacious two-storeyed mansion, where he had been staying off and on, since the death of Dr Ansari, had during these months become a hostel for "approved" Congress politicians. It was a bit over-crowded. Gandhi had a large entourage which placed a strain on the richest of hosts, not because of what they ate and how much, but because of their flexible number, and even more because of the variety of the dietary fads they practised. They represented a gastronomic laboratory. He foresaw that his stay in Delhi this time may be of an indefinite duration. He therefore thought of camping somewhere cheaply, rather than accept the hospitality of any of his rich admirers. Yet, in whatever he did there was a touch of the spectacular. "Friends" searched for a locality, which could be politically challenging and privately cheap. The choice finally fell on this obscure, dusty, dirty lane inhabited by the families of *bhangies*, beyond which stretched the undulating "ridge".

For the first few days, life was simple and unexciting. A couple of reed and bamboo huts went up. Prayer meetings were held in the open. The *bhangies* were proud and thrilled! They felt as if God had come to sanctify their dusty street. Soon the number of huts increased. The existing ones assumed more agreeable shapes and comfortable forms. Telephones began ringing. The limousines of princes, cars of businessmen and high officials, even Rolls Royces and Daimlers from the Vice-roy's House streamed through the little lane.

² The architect and designer of New Delhi.

On this second day of September, when the *bhangies* had gone collecting garbage and nightsoil, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, Sarat Bose, Baldev Singh and others reached the Bhangi Colony in luxury limousines. Gandhi had drafted a code of instructions which he expected his visitors to follow when they embarked on their new career. Gandhi offered a broad smile to each. With his own hands he placed a little vermillion on each one's forehead and then wished them success. After receiving Gandhi's blessings, Nehru and his colleagues motored to the Viceroy's House, where in the traditional Durbar Hall they were sworn in. They had formed the first "National Cabinet", announced Nehru on the radio. "This is no Cabinet," growled Jinnah. "You just cannot turn a donkey into an elephant by calling it an elephant." Jinnah was sore.

The interim government truly was not a "Cabinet". It was not even as effective as the old "Executive Council". The Viceroy was still supreme. European officials exercised a great deal of power—especially for mischief.

Patel was a realist. A typical party boss, generous to friends and ruthless to opponents, using his power as much to keep party control in his own hands as to use the machinery of the party for the good of the country. He suffered Nehru because the country and the party needed him and because he himself could not do without him. If he had better health and less devotion to Gandhi, he may have perhaps made an open bid for dictatorship. But he preferred to rule without wearing the crown. He became Nehru's Deputy.

Nehru took charge of Foreign Affairs and acted as Vice-President of the Council. Since the Executive Council did not meet often enough, he did not have much to do. There were no foreign embassies, except perhaps a personal representative of the American President, George Merrel, and Gen. Ian Mackay, the Australian High Commissioner.

Rajen Babu took charge of Food, only to learn that there was terrible shortage of food and no means to meet the shortage. He learnt also that the food shortage could equally

be a food surplus. The production, supply and consumption figures had been so handled by imaginative officers in the Secretariat that they could swell into a surplus, or shrink into a famine, to suit the needs of the Food Ministry. Vallabhbhai Patel took the Home portfolio. Control of the Home Ministry meant complete control of the administrative machinery and control of the ICS. Vallabhbhai, however, could not assume more than a semblance of control. Due to the machinations and malevolent intentions of some of the European officials and Muslim underlings, the machinery began working openly to promote "lawlessness and disorder" in the country.

By October, Jinnah had afterthoughts. He finally agreed to send representatives of the Muslim League to join the interim government. Jinnah's list was both a surprise and a shock to his supporters. For one thing, he did not include himself. When I asked him later why he had not nominated himself, he said, "It was not an act of modesty, I assure you. But I seriously feel that no good is going to come out of this interim government. It can, however, do harm to the Muslims. I only wanted some people who could prevent such harm." To another correspondent, he said, "Frankly, only second-rate men were needed, but I have sent in some first-class men also." His reference was probably to his chief lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan. Another surprise in his list was an obscure leader of the depressed classes, one Jogendra Nath Mandal. Mandal was neither a Muslim nor a member of the Muslim League. Jinnah had earlier insisted that the League alone should nominate Muslims, and the Congress, non-Muslims. But when it came actually to nominating five representatives of the League, he included a Hindu from the depressed classes. It shocked his supporters and his critics. Jinnah explained with a chuckle: "It may seem inconsistent, but why should the care of backward classes be the monopoly of the Congress and Gandhi?" "But they are Hindus," I protested. "So are the so-called 'nationalist' Muslims, Muslims," he said. "Believe me, Mandal is more independent than most of them."

Nehru and his colleagues soon realized that the Interim

Government was a fraud—a share to torpedo the Constituent Assembly and to make Congress leaders look like fools. The League representatives openly sided with Wavell and served as the henchmen of European reactionaries in the services and outside.

Meanwhile, serious communal disturbances started in Bengal. Reports poured in of a massacre in Calcutta, and savage brutal carnage in Noakhali. Gandhi left his camp in the Bhangi Colony, and proceeded to Bengal. His was a brave venture undertaken in the face of terrible odds, at a time when even sober men had become insane. He had no deterrent except his capacity to absorb the violence and the insanity of the bigots and the bullies in himself. The day he left the Bhangi Colony for this great adventure, he said to us with intense pain, but in a soft assured voice: "And if it comes to it you will witness what it is to joyfully die, inch by inch, limb by limb, part by part, i.e. *six* degrees, in the service of nonviolence and in obedience to the inner voice."

Gandhi had hardly reached the first of the major centres of disturbances in Noakhali, when news came of the Bihar holocaust, where Hindus had repeated in measure of violence, though not in rape, conversion and pillage, what had happened in Bengal. The interim government grew more and more into a house divided. In Cabinet meetings, men like Nishtar and Ghazansfar Ali employed, *sotto voce*, crude epithets within Nehru's hearing to provoke and annoy him. Nehru and his colleagues continued to protest to Wavell, but they hung on to their posts almost to the point of losing face.

Meanwhile, the Home Government began to feel concerned. Apart from what had happened in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar, reports of some of the officials saying to the victims of communal violence to go to Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, of some of them openly planning League strategy to paralyse the administration, also reached London. Wavell was suddenly invited to visit England, with Nehru and Jinnah, accompanied by Baldev Singh and Liaquat Ali Khan. This was all too unexpected!

The Wavell-Nehru-Jinnah contingent made the flight to London on an American Army plane, with improvised seats for the passengers. The journey was slow, rough and unexciting.³ Wavell spoke to Nehru twice and twice to Jinnah. Nehru offered Jinnah his greetings as they touched the first stop. Jinnah grinningly asked what Nehru had been reading. Nehru had been scanning the reports of the planning body he had earlier set up within the Congress. "Still planning!" Jinnah remarked blandly.

On arrival in London, Nehru realized for the first time that the Congress had been cheated. In a fresh declaration (December 6) the Cabinet made it clear that the provinces belonging to groups A and B, i.e. Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier, Baluchistan and Bengal and Assam, had been given no initial choice but to sit with their groups to frame their respective constitutions. They could only get out of the designated group after the constitution had been framed and that too by a majority vote of the "group". This meant that the fate of the frontier was linked up with Sind, Punjab and Baluchistan, and the fate of Assam rested on the combined Muslim numerical strength of Bengal and Assam. The Cabinet was not willing to refer the matter to the Federal Court, as the Congress suggested. Jinnah pompously declared that the matter was not justiciable. By this interpretation, the minority community in these groups could decide the fate of the majority in other provinces, and also of the country in which the Muslims were less than one-fourth of the population.

³ The manner in which our special reporter, P. D. Sharma, made the trip tells something of the hazards and the reporting difficulties of those days. All requests to the Viceroy by the new Vice-President of the Executive Council, Nehru, had been turned down. But when a sportive American Air Force pilot heard that an Indian correspondent could not be taken in the Viceregal plane, he offered to carry him as "cargo" in the plane taking the luggage of the Viceroy and party. Sharma did the trip labelled "cargo". Nehru and Jinnah were surprised when they found Sharma waiting to greet them at the London airport. It happened that the Wavell plane was delayed at Malta on account of mechanical trouble and the cargo plane arrived a couple of hours ahead of the party.

Vallabhbhai wrote plaintively to Cripps:⁴ "All of us here feel that there has been a betrayal." Nehru just swallowed the gross injustice. His only justification for not tearing up the fraud, and walking out of the interim government, was that they did not wish to "add to our enemies".

Nehru and others met Gandhi at a Noakhali village for advice. His advice was logical and unassailable. While the Congress, or the interim government at the Centre, may be committed to a particular course of action, he said, there was nothing to prevent Assam, the North-West Frontier, even parts of the Punjab and Bengal from refusing to join their assigned groups, if the majority of their representatives elected to the Constituent Assembly so decided. Even the Congress could "not compel" a unit against the will of the people. In that event, the Congress may have to allow Assam and the North-West Frontier Province to "secede from the Congress for the purpose of the Constituent Assembly". All this "would be in accordance with the Cabinet Mission's declaration". But Gandhi's bold advice fell on deaf ears.

Wavell did not expect to be cashiered at this time. Worse—to be openly censured for his ineptitude. Attlee felt Wavell had bungled. He was ordered to quit. It was the traditional method of the British to make a scapegoat of someone for political failures. The old war-horse got a bad kick at a wrong time. His daughter's marriage was on hand.

It now turned into a tame affair. It reflected the difference between a Viceroy in power and a Viceroy under dismissal. There were plenty of notable guests. There were a large number of presents on display, some very costly, some unusually attractive. But there were whispers about princes who had ordered emerald and ruby necklaces and decided at the last moment in favour of crockery and cutlery. Some who had chosen "Windsor" furniture with French tapestry and changed over to indigenous styles with less expensive coverings. Never before had a Viceroy wed his daughter in India. Never before had a Viceroy been "dismissed" before his term ! I was at a loss

⁴ Dec. 15, 1946.

property auction a few months later. A mounted tiger-head attracted my attention. Mine was a small bid. Even then the hammer fell in my favour. The head carried a card tied to the collar: "To Lord Wavell—New Delhi". Below was the official notation: "Unclaimed property—addressee untraceable".

26

Operation Scuttle

Her tapering, pink, high-heeled shoes lay beside the white rush easy chair on which she was reclining. Her bare feet rested on a stool. She belonged to the smart set which had been bitten by the prevalent craze for sunbathing. The "set" believed in exposing to the sun as much of the body as conditions would permit, and anywhere the sun was agreeably available. The shorts were terribly short. An open newspaper shielded a greater part of the body. Coming from the Far East, the lady had just landed at the Dum Dum Airport.¹ It was the early part of the war. Dum Dum had big runways, but a small airport building. The restaurant was located a few hundred yards away in the Flying Club. I was wearing a white khadi achkan and white pyjamas. I was crossing over from the airport to the restaurant. The lady, mistaking me for a "bearer", beckoned imperiously. She summoned all her resources of "Anglo-Hindustani" and with genial gestures explained that she was waiting for her breakfast, which she wanted to be served very urgently and "in the sun". She also wanted a cable to be sent "at once", the text of which she handed over to me. I bowed gently. But as soon as I replied in "non-butler" English, that I would see that her breakfast was sent, and someone would take charge of the cable, she became suddenly self-conscious. In split seconds she was standing in her shoes, with garments mysteriously unrolling all over her body. She realized her error. Politely she suggested I direct her to the

¹The airport in Calcutta.

restaurant, and the telegraph office. I found her extraordinarily charming, and very well-informed about India. She soon noticed I was a Congressman and inquired why I was not wearing a white cap. It was under very different circumstances that I met Lady Mountbatten a few years later.

In 1946, Nehru found the time to pay a visit to Singapore and Malaya. At Singapore, Rear Admiral Mountbatten was in command. Nehru was to unveil a memorial to the Indian National Army. Some of its officers and men were still being held as prisoners of war. Nehru was then President of the Congress, and was shortly to be invited to head the Interim Government. Wavell had sent advance word secretly to Mountbatten accordingly.

Mountbatten had been on tour till the actual day of Nehru's arrival. The British authorities disliked Nehru's idea of unveiling a memorial to men who had "deserted the King's forces". They were reluctant to receive him. Mountbatten on arrival overruled the boycotters and threatened to send his own car to receive Nehru, if an official transport was not arranged. He also ordered that Indians should be freely invited to the airport to receive him. He even placed army trucks at the disposal of Indians residing in outlying areas to join in the reception to their great leader.

The British in Rangoon had also been pigheaded. They refused permission to Nehru's plane to land on its way to Singapore. Nehru baffled them by making what seemed a "forced landing" in a field near the airport, thanks to the daring of an adventurous pilot.² While the landing was "forced" to all appearances, more than a few thousand Indians had "mysteriously" assembled near the field to receive him. This delayed Nehru's arrival in Singapore by a few hours. Nehru did not know that Mountbatten had arranged for him to meet some high-ranking officials and civilians. He drove straight from the airport to Government House where Mountbatten and other dignitaries were waiting. It was a quiet, informal stag affair, a sort of late lunch and early tea.

² Mr Biju Patnaik.

Next on schedule was a drive through the streets where Indians, Malaysians and Chinese were all lined up to cheer Nehru. Nehru was agreeably surprised when Mountbatten directed him to an open carriage and, sitting side by side, drove him through the cheering, festive crowd to an Indian soldiers' canteen. Here he was to meet some of the Indian officers and soldiers. Lady Mountbatten had been taking keen interest in the welfare of soldiers and their families. There was a big rush as Nehru and Mountbatten entered the main reception room. They found Edwina missing. They both got on chairs, anxiously trying to scan the milling crowd. As Nehru started pushing some people in the front row, he saw a petite woman crawling out of the crowd. The lady re-arranged her dress as if nothing had happened, and greeted him with a cheerful, terribly winsome smile. Nehru later learnt that while Edwina Mountbatten had been there waiting for him and her husband to arrive, the crowd had made a mad rush, knocking her down, till she just managed to crawl out of the mêlée. It was a most unusual introduction for both—unforgettable and touching! The visit would have remained among Nehru's fond remembrances if events had not occurred later to revive this friendship and bring all three of them together in the centre of the Indian stage, in the final drama of India's struggle for freedom.

Having dismissed Wavell, Atlee summoned Mountbatten to take over the Viceroyalty, with a clear mandate that power was to be transferred to one or more than one successor government or governments, as the case may be, before June, 1948. The Cabinet Mission plan still held the field. Churchill almost prophetically but appropriately described his new command "Operation Scuttle". So it was. Mountbatten was sent "ostensibly" to preserve and save the unity of India if he could. Failing which, though this was not stated in his mandate, to scuttle the ship, divide the country, leave the salvage operations to others and come home. He carried out "Operation Scuttle", in the shortest possible period, with utmost tact, of which only a naval commander of great resourcefulness

could be capable. It was a master job of political surgery, never yet attempted in terms of such large populations and so vast a geographical area. It was an operation carried out with reckless disregard for past history or future complications, through a process of consent which had an element of the hypnotic.

The Mountbattens were great extroverts. The arrival of the Mountbattens was heralded with a lot of pre-arranged fanfare. The departure of the Wavells was an unusually tame affair. In fact, it had been conventional for the coming Viceroy and the parting Viceroy to say farewell without meeting. Wavell was made to stay on. He stayed over till the Mountbattens arrived. He received the Mountbattens and then had them to a dinner to bid farewell to himself. Next morning, on the 23rd of March, the Wavells quietly left. A gun salute welcomed the Mountbattens. On the 24th of March, the Mountbattens were sworn in. There was something theatrical about the ceremony. The pomp and splendour with which they surrounded themselves seemed like a Hollywood presentation of royalty. They both played the part with consummate perfection. The Durbar Hall which earlier used to be modestly lit, even though the chandelliers were expensive and plenty, was in a blaze of lights. The "throne" seats had been raised by a couple of feet. The blue and the gold in the tapestry were emphasized by hidden lights playing on the Viceroy and the Vicereine. A mammoth red velvet screen hung in the background with the Mountbatten crest. Aides in uniform lined up on both sides of the "throne". On the right sat Nehru and the Congress members of the Interim Government. On the left sat Liaquat Ali Khan and his League colleagues. The Mountbattens wore spotless naval white, with sashes in royal blue, and rows of medals of great distinction. Everything was colourful! They both looked, under the false light, so terribly young, so magnificently dolled-up that one would have mistaken it as a minor royal coronation or a delayed royal wedding. Incidentally, as the two sat on the throne chairs, surrounded by all that aura of splendour, one heard whispers, how it was in India that the Mountbattens had first met, and how it was now again in

India after prolonged periods of separation they had come together in a fresh adventure of "service."³

Whether the Mountbattens still loved each other intensely or as some suggested their affection was now a part of politics, it must be said to their credit that during the short Viceroyalty, followed by a short Governor-Generalship, the Mountbattens acted and moved with perfect understanding. The speed with which both of them worked left very little time either for emotions or for misunderstandings. They were like two actors constantly engaged in playing a chosen part. They played their parts with such consummate perfection that, in the background of history, it began to seem all the more convincing. I cannot say who was more skilful, or more convincing, Louis or Edwina. I can only say that very few escaped the Mountbatten spell among those they had decided to work upon.

"Six feet two inches tall, tough as a whip-cord, fond of the limelight, colour parades, uniforms and gadgets,"⁴ Mountbatten was a keen sportsman, which to his chagrin earned him the nickname of "playboy". After describing his staff companions, Pyarelal writes: "Last but not least, a 'secret weapon' of no small strategic value in Lord Mountbatten's arsenal of personal diplomacy, was Lady Mountbatten, a heroine in her own right... who by her unfailing tact, warm womanly sympathy and fine discrimination provided just what her impetuous husband needed most." Abul Kalam Azad was even more suggestive of the role of Lady Mountbatten.⁵ "Jawaharlal was also greatly impressed by Lord Mountbatten," he wrote, "but perhaps even greater was the influence of Lady Mountbatten. She is not only extremely intelligent, but has a most attractive and friendly temperament." It should be said to the credit of Nehru that while on occasions he was deeply influenced by

³ Mountbatten took an early opportunity, after assuming Viceroyalty, to drive down to the University enclave, to see the old Viceroy's House where he had met Edwina and the actual room in which he had stayed as a companion to Edward, Prince of Wales, in the early twenties.

⁴ Writes Pyarelal of Mountbatten in his *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Vol. II, p. 73.

⁵ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 184.

the Mountbattens, the Mountbattens in return, also began to be influenced and guided by him in many matters.

Unlike Nehru, the Mountbattens found Jinnah frigid, arrogant, suspicious and utterly noncommittal in everything he said or did. Mountbatten, while speaking of his first interview with Jinnah, said that it took him more than an hour to "defreeze" him. On another occasion, two hours with Jinnah gave him one of "the rare headaches" of his life. After Jinnah lost his wife, his sister had been his only feminine companion. He still liked the company of pretty women, but his irrepressible arrogance rarely induced intimacy. Begum Liaquat during this period was perhaps the only one with whom Jinnah shared his confidences or in whose company he felt relaxed. Begum Liaquat was a remarkable lady. She was a versatile hostess, a good conversationalist and a real sport. She contributed considerably to the success of Liaquat as a politician. She helped to build up his intimacy with Jinnah, which made Liaquat almost indispensable to him. She established social contacts for Liaquat and converted him from a mere "playboy" to a serious-minded and ambitious politician.

When Jinnah first met Lady Mountbatten, she saw how utterly self-centered he was. As Jinnah and her husband were posing for photographers, Jinnah invited Lady Mountbatten to join them. When she did, he gallantly remarked, "It is like a rose between two thorns." The humour was lost on the Mountbattens, since the published picture showed Jinnah grinning sardonically, standing between the husband and the wife. While Mountbatten skilfully concentrated on Liaquat during all difficult negotiations, preserving Jinnah as the final authority, Lady Mountbatten realized that she could reach both Liaquat and Jinnah more easily through Begum Liaquat. It was interesting at this period to watch how much Rene Liaquat had changed from a ball-room waltzing socialite of her maiden years, when I knew her first, to a modest, devout-looking Begum, wearing bell-jar pyjamas, trailing veils and flowing shirts of the days of Wajid Ali Shah. She, like many other wives of leading League politicians of the time, had discarded the sari to emphasise

Islam sartorially. Some like Miss Jinnah wore the *salwar* of the North, a long, constricted shirt and a veil. At public functions, Jinnah and his sister now both appeared in *salwars*. Mrs Sarojini Naidu jokingly suggested that they were both perhaps sharing their "Islamic" wardrobe. Lady Mountbatten and Rene Liaquat soon became good friends.

During one of my early interviews with her, Lady Mountbatten discussed a variety of subjects, and posed a most intriguing question. She asked me who I thought was at the time, among prominent Congress women, the most attractive, the most well-informed, and the most eligible for high office. I naturally thought of Mrs Sarojini Naidu who had been Congress President, was one of the best speakers, was most well-informed and in her own way and for her age very attractive. "Give me another guess," she said. I mentioned Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then Minister of Education in the U.P. Government. "No," she said, "give me still another guess." I reluctantly upgraded Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, believing that maybe on account of her devotion to Gandhiji she had encouraged the illusion of many virtues. I was still wrong. Finally, I gave up. "None of you," she said, "seems to have come into intimate contact with Maniben Patel. You all seem to ignore her because she is her father's daughter. I find her most attractive and charming." I took a few gulps as she continued. "She is not learned, but very well-informed. She is not brilliant but she is full of ideas. She would, like her father, make a very good administrator. She is best suited for high office." Lady Mountbatten was so serious that I could not even suggest that this discovery of hers was certainly the grand slam of public relations! I realized she had found the right key to Vallabhbhai Patel, but the hard way. I knew how difficult and odious it was to establish cordial relations with Maniben. She was a rare mixture of adolescence and conceit. Yet the fact remained that Edwina Mountbatten had done it!

Mountbatten, on his part, enlisted in his entourage the only Indian official who had free access to the Sardar and whose

plans and policies appealed to Patel. It was V. P. Menon. To the surprise of many, Mountbatten not only brought V. P. into some of his most intimate consultations, but made him feel that he had his full confidence. He was the only Indian officer he took with him to London when he went to discuss his new plan with the Cabinet. Azad in his book quotes Mountbatten as saying that Sardar Patel was like a walnut, terribly hard outside, but very soft inside. But if the simile of the walnut had any meaning, the Mountbattens, between Maniben and V. P. Menon, had the two handles of the nut-cracker firmly in hand. Thus, on many vital matters, Mountbatten or Edwina would have known the views of Vallabhbhai through these two, before talking to Nehru or Liaquat.

Devdas Gandhi, the fourth son of Mahatma Gandhi, had succeeded me as Editor of *The Hindustan Times*.⁶ Unlike his father, Devdas liked good food, and rarely refused it at any time of the day. I also shared with Devdas a healthy appetite. We were sitting opposite each other at a lunch with Mountbatten. The guests were few and the conversation was mostly directed at us. Devdas was a vegetarian. I was not. Devdas was shocked when, of the three courses, I passed off two, took very little of the third, ending with a small helping of dessert. I soon lit up a cigar and over coffee kept up the conversation, carefully watching every gesture and every move of Mountbatten. He was a great and wonderful actor with the agility and the movements of a robot. Devdas was too engrossed, managing rice, *rasam*, *dal* and a variety of vegetables and snacks. He thus missed a lot of the conversation and some suggestive mannerisms. When Devdas later inquired whether I was observing some kind of fast, I told him "no, I was observing Mountbatten". On an earlier occasion, I had seen that the Viceroy just fiddled with his food. He ate almost nothing, only pretending to do so. He used every minute watching his guests closely, taking note of what they said and

⁶ The National Call had by this time been sold to the interests which controlled *The Times of India*, Bombay. Its name had been changed to *Indian News Chronicle*. I was its Chief Editor at the time.

how they said it, and observing almost everything in an uncanny fashion. He generally had eaten before moving formally to the table.

Devdas and I were together again. Among a few distinguished ladies, we were the only two male guests whom Lady Mountbatten had invited. As a precaution we had both eaten before reaching the Viceroy's House. We, however, looked like fools when we saw Lady Mountbatten and her lady guests having a full meal before our very eyes. We never felt so cheated! Lady Mountbatten, unlike her husband, ate her normal meal with the guests, because as a hostess she could know what they liked most and how it was cooked. She had been the first to introduce the Indian cuisine in the Viceroy's House. The vegetarians were even served on a platter (*thali*). When I mentioned that during one of the meals a distinguished Congress guest had informally washed his hands from the tumbler, and was even in the process of gargling, she did not join in the rollicking laughter that followed. She looked glum and serious. Soon after we left she called in the Superintendent of the Household and said, "Something should be done about this." In due course the *hamals* with wash basins, jugs and towels stood by to help the guests. Except for the *ugaldans*,⁷ everything was available in Indian style.

All this may now seem trivial with the passage of time. But in those days these carefully-planned gestures, these concessions to Indian sentiment and behaviour, had a tremendous effect. The generation that was then stepping into high office represented men who were first sent to prison by Lord Reading. None of them had ever entered the Viceroy's House. Lord Irwin made history by allowing Gandhi to eat his own food on two occasions in the Moghul Gardens. Irwin met Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel and other important Congress members of the Assembly, only at carefully arranged tea parties. The Willingdons had their own ballroom set. They ignored the Congress, just as the Congress ignored them. Linlithgow opened the Viceroy's House to Congress rebels during the visit of

⁷ Spittoons.

Cripps and during the less agreeable visit of Chiang Kai-shek. But no social communion was encouraged.* Wavell invited Nehru and Azad to stay in the Viceroy's Estate at Simla. He even entertained Congress and League members of the interim government quite a few times. But the routine remained traditional—formal and hide-bound. The Mountbattens therefore had set a revolution in hospitality. On one occasion after a meal I was talking to Gadgil and Neogy, who had been among the oldest legislators in the capital. They later became ministers in the Central Cabinet. Both had eaten a square meal. "That rice and fish must have been prepared by a Bengali cook," said Neogy. "Even the vegetarian dishes were delicious," said Gadgil enthusiastically. "And to think that one need not leave his seat for washing or gargling! How considerate!!"

Once when some of the Editors had been invited, two aides from the Viceroy's House came to me just to find out what would be the most suitable and acceptable food in the case of different Editors. Lady Mountbatten was amazingly unconventional and yet no less regal than any of the Maharajas and Maharanis. Once I got a message from the Viceroy's House that Lady Mountbatten was paying me a "surprise" visit and would I be at home between so and so hour in the evening. No Vicerene had ventured to visit private Indian homes in the past, leave aside of an Editor. I found that Devdas had received a similar message. I did not know how many more Editors she was visiting. Later we received another message asking us to expect a visit another day, since Lady Mounthatten's programme had been suddenly altered. Actually, as will be mentioned later, the same morning something very critical of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Claude Auchinleck, and some other high-ranking military officials had appeared in the papers and it was felt by her advisers that such a visit, even though the motive was just good public relations, might be misunderstood.

While the Mountbattens were thus engaged in establishing a new relationship with top Indians, high European officers holding key positions in the Government were trying hard to

scuttle national unity. This was being done secretly through encouraging acts of communal lawlessness. A wave of arson, murder, loot and rape was spreading throughout the country. The idea was to compel Congress leaders on the one hand to feel that division of India was inevitable and unavoidable, and force Jinnah on the other to a point of no return, so that even a tattered, moth-eaten, shrunken Pakistan could seem to him and the League acceptable. The man behind the plan was the Home Secretary, Sir Francis Mudie.

Mudie was not so intelligent as he was subtle. He was among those Civil Servants who in 1937 had held key posts under Congress Ministries in the provinces. He had known Congress politicians in office, out of office, in prison, out of prison, their social weaknesses and political virtues intimately. He claimed to be the mysterious author of the formula which enabled Congress Ministers to by-pass the Gandhi dictat that Congress Ministers should not accept more than five hundred rupees a month. The salaries remained at five hundred. But a whole lot of perquisites under the "Mudie Plan" reduced the five hundred to pocket money. As Home Secretary, he now extended the same generosity to the interim government. Not one Congress or League leader declined the extra perquisites. There was no reduction in salaries. They were the same as were being paid to earlier Members of the Executive Council. All five houses originally built for the Members of the Executive Council along the Grand Vista which were once referred to as "palaces" were now condemned by everybody as small and most unsuitable. Nehru and Patel were given a free choice. Nehru selected a large, double-storeyed private house belonging to a lawyer. Patel, extraordinarily enough, expressed his preference for a neighbouring house, also belonging to a private party, which his brother Vithalbhai Patel had once occupied after he had resigned as Speaker. His wish was duly respected. I remember the brother of Rajen Babu complaining, when No. 1 Rajendra Prasad Road was allotted to him, "The place is too small for the family." "But Manohar Babu," I protested, "families are supposed to live in their family homes in their native place."

This is not practical, he said. "You have been listening to Gandhiji too much. He expects Congress Ministers to live in small huts and travel by bus. Just think of Nehruji, Sardar Patel and Rajen Babu waiting to catch a bus, while Liaquat, Nishtar and Ghazanfar Ali pass them in large official cars, throwing dust in their faces!"

It was true! The Viceroy and the Civil Servants had been deliberately generous in meeting even the most extravagant wishes of Congress and League Ministers. Gandhi was severely critical of "this misuse of the tax-payer's money". Mudie and others wanted to publicise this discord between advertised austerity and comouflaged extravagance. Mudie did not even spare Jinnah. He knew who were loyal to Jinnah in the League and who were not. He became the friend and adviser of both and pulled the strings in favour of, or against Jinnah, as he liked.⁸ Unlike his predecessors, Mudie was utterly unconventional. He had free access to the homes of quite a few loyalists and members of the League. He even knew the names of their mistresses.

Sir Claud Auchinleck was highly respected as a soldier and as Commander-in-Chief, by all sections, till he came under the influence of the League. In his spacious home, which later became the permanent official residence of Nehru,⁹ one came across some very interesting people. Auchinleck played host to princes, went shooting with them and joined in their entertainment. The son of a Muslim ruler from a neighbouring State was one of his influential aides. He helped to develop his taste for Indian music and good Indian food, since his father was known to have a special cook for every major dish. A Muslim army officer, who later became an important General in Pakistan and led the first raid on Kashmir, was his chief military aide. He had a capable, versatile and charming wife. According to some top officers, they came to know of postings,

⁸ Khaliquzzaman often refers to him as his close friend and adviser. There were times when Khaliquzzaman was staunchly opposing Jinnah.

⁹ As the first Prime Minister.

transfers, promotions, demotions, etc. even earlier than the Defence Minister. She was both a poet and a singer, possessing a deep husky voice one could not easily forget. She and her husband practically ran the Auchenleck establishment.

Sir Archibald Rowlands served as Jinnah's economic adviser. It was he who advised Liaquat to frame his first budget as Finance Minister in the Interim Government. This budget forced the dismemberment of India, more than the lawlessness engineered by the League. The budget was so framed as to drive a wedge between Nehru and Patel, on the one hand, and to deal a serious financial blow to the rich commercial and industrial concerns, which were mostly run by non-Muslims, on the other. Liaquat put forward proposals to wipe off war profits which it was believed had Nehru's approval. He recommended a ninety per cent levy on Capital Gains. This hit the Hindus, the Parisis, etc. more than it injured the Muslims. The latter were economically still pretty backward. These proposals were cunningly camouflaged in "socialistic" language. Several Congress socialists felt agitated when rightists like Patel and Rajen Babu solemnly condemned them. Liaquat's budget so completely astounded and shocked rich patrons of the Congress that they brought all their pressure to bear on the leaders to break from the Interim Government, divide India if need be, but have nothing to do with men like Liaquat and Jinnah, who were taking advantage of the socialist bias of the Congress to exploit it for a communal advantage to the Muslims.

Sir Olaf Caroe was now Governor of the North-West Frontier Province. He had spent many years among Pathans. He knew the tribal chiefs and *khans*. He was familiar with the methods British agents had employed for nearly a century to organize and regulate war or peace on the Frontier. The Red Shirts, led by the Khan Brothers, had been growing from strength to strength during the last twenty-five years. They represented the Congress. Dr Khan Sahib had been head of the provincial government in 1937. He was again in power with a majority supporting him. The younger brother, Khan

Abdul Ghaffar Khan, was almost worshipped for his humility, integrity and austerity.

Reactionary officials who supported Jinnah, and wanted his fiction of a two-nation theory to be accepted as a fact, realized that so long as the Frontier remained a Red Shirt stronghold the League could not justify its predominantly representative status. To start with, a subtle propaganda was initiated among Hindus that the Red Shirts and more so the Khan Brothers, were interested in having an independent Pathan State, to join up later with Afghanistan. They were only using the Congress to build up their own position. The Frontier consisted of Pathans in the north and of convert Muslims in the southern enclaves. The latter were looked upon by the "blue-blooded" as racially inferior. Their jealousy and resentment were exploited to damn the Red Shirts who were still predominantly Pathan. Among the most trusted lieutenants of the Khan Brothers was a shrewd lawyer, Abdul Qayum Khan. Abdul Qayum was not a Pathan, even though he spoke Pushtu, dressed in a Pathan fur cap and behaved with Pathan brusqueness. He was actually from a neo-convert family of Kashmir. A Kashmiri Muslim in the eyes of a tribal was as much of a Pathan as a Kerala Christian a European. Abdul Qayum, however, was a fluent and capable speaker, a shrewd politician and ambitious. He had represented the Red Shirts in the Central Assembly. Finding prospects in the Frontier growing bright for the League, he crossed the floor and joined the League. While the Khan Brothers were in prison in 1942, he spearheaded the Opposition with the help of several disgruntled elements and succeeded in building up the influence of the League. In these efforts he found two powerful allies. A young, ambitious religious divine, the Pir of Manki, and the Governor of the Frontier, Sir Olaf Caroe. The Pir of Manki was a religious firebrand who brought to the League the veneer of Islamic sanction. Before leaving the Congress and the Red Shirts, Qayum had also poisoned some Congressmen against the Khan Brothers. He told Abul Kalam Azad that the Khan Brothers were not as popular as they claimed, and that they disliked Azad for supporting the

May 16 declaration. Partly because of Qayum's secret reports and partly because of personal reasons, Azad felt prejudiced against the Khan Brothers. Azad in his turn tried to influence Nehru and Patel against them.

The Bihar riots helped League leaders like Manki, Qayum, Nishtar and others, supported by whispering officials, to fan the flames of communal hatred in the Frontier. The entire propaganda machinery was geared to the service of the League, to accuse Hindus of diabolical crimes, to spread the fiction that the Khan Brothers were Congress stooges, and to create among the Pathans the fear that they may not get a square deal from the Hindus in a united India. "Why not have a free 'Pathan-istan' for yourselves" was the suggestion of some of the officials.

Sir Conrad Corfield was head of the Political Department, claiming to be the "conscience keeper" of the princes. The princes in this transitional period were in a terrible state of confusion. It was easy to create in them a deep sense of fear and to misguide their judgment. While the relationship between the Crown and the Indian States had been originally based on a whole set of treaties, the British Government vis-a-vis the rulers had been designated as the "Paramount Power". Legal advisers of the Congress held the view that Paramountcy should automatically descend to the successor government. Corfield and his reactionary Junta posed themselves as "saviours" in the eyes of the princes by telling them that they were pleading that Paramountcy should end with the end of the Crown relationship and that the States should be made completely independent sovereign units through the same Act which made India free. "You should be free to decide your future," they said. "God help you if you were to be handed over to the Gandhi caps."

I happened to be in Bombay, staying at the Taj Mahal Hotel where the Standing Committee of the Princes was in conference. The princes met to decide their attitude towards the Constituent Assembly which had already met. The Political Department was represented in full force headed by Conrad Corfield. Patel was represented, to the rulers, as a ruthless dictator, only waiting to break up the princely order. Nehru's speeches as President

of the States' Peoples' Conference and President of the Congress were freely quoted. By his own admission, Nehru, it was suggested, was a socialist. The princes had no place in a "socialist pattern of society". Give the Congress a free hand and "your heads will roll" and "your estates will be liquidated". Even the rich *jagirdars* and *talukdars* would "suffer the same fate". In social conversation over drinks it was said, "You'd better look out, Your Highness. Under Congress *raj*, you will have to drink 'Ganges' water. Whisky, of course, will be banned, but I don't know what will happen to your own 'Asha' and 'Jaman'."¹⁰ Another would say: "No more tiger shoots, Your Highness. Even shooting snipe and grouse will be prohibited. You will have to be nonviolent!"

¹⁰ Patent indigenous liquors brewed in Indian States.

Mountbatten Checkmates Gandhi

Once again after nearly sixteen years the "Naked Faqir" of India sat outside in the Moghul Gardens of Viceroy's House to have his midday meal. The menu: hot lemon soup, dates and goat's milk. His grand daughter, Manu, laid the meal in two iron plates, a discarded can and a tumbler. The spoon showed the wear and tear of long usage. The ladle had lost the handle and was tied to a small bamboo piece with a string. As Gandhi ate, Mountbatten sipped tepid tea from oyster-white china carrying the Viceregal crest. The three hundred-roomed, red sandstone-buffed, three-storyed Viceroy's House stood in the background.

Gandhi had heard a lot about Mountbatten's "charm" and his "innate sincerity" from Nehru and Patel. He was now to experience it first hand. Mountbatten, on his part, had come to the conclusion that Gandhi was still the greatest among Congress leaders and that if he could win over Gandhi, it would be his greatest triumph. Failing that, if he could isolate Gandhi, it would be triumph nonetheless. He had invited Gandhi to see him almost as soon as he arrived.

Mountbatten gave the impression that the Viceroy was in an impatient haste to fulfil his mission and go home. The way Gandhi replied to the Viceroy's invitation showed that Gandhi neither shared his impatience nor his ostensible eagerness for an early meeting. Gandhi at that time had moved from

Noakhali to Bihar, where with the help of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and a few others he was trying to rehabilitate the Muslim victims of Hindu ruffianism, in the same manner as he had tried to help Hindu victims of Muslim goondaism in Noakhali. It was in Bihar and Noakhali, Gandhi felt, that the future of India was to be decided and not in New Delhi.

He wrote to Mountbatten in reply to his invitation of the 22nd March: "I am just now leaving for one of the disturbed areas of Bihar.... I return from this third Bihar tour on the 28th instant. My departure will therefore be as quickly as I can arrange it after the 28th." Only Gandhi could keep a Viceroy waiting! In the present case, it was worse. Gandhi was to keep the Viceroy guessing! Mountbatten had come with set plans, but he wanted to keep all the trumps up his sleeve, till he had sounded the leaders of different parties. Sounding Gandhi was essential before he decided to deal with the rest. With him every day mattered. Every minute counted. But the very indefiniteness with which Gandhi responded indicated his indifference. Mountbatten offered to send his own York plane to save time. Gandhi was grateful, but preferred to travel by train. A special train was offered. The ordinary train for him was fast enough. So eight days after the urgent Viceregal summons, Gandhi took his seat in a third-class compartment at Patna to reach Delhi the next day, spending almost twenty-four hours on the journey.

After Gandhi arrived, it was Mountbatten's turn to show that he had all the time in the world at his disposal. Instead of rushing into vital discussions on the first day, he said he would prefer to know from Gandhi a little of his eventful life-story from his own lips to know and understand him better. Gandhi liked this approach. Except General Smuts, none of the British satraps had wanted to know him through himself. As Gandhi related the highlights of his life, Mountbatten was trying to measure the stature of this spiritual giant, whom no temptation could corrupt, no fear terrorise, and no provocation urge to violence. Listening to him, he also felt convinced that unlike other Congress and League leaders, Gandhi was

deeply wedded to the concept of a united India. No amount of reasoning or logic would persuade him to agree to partition.

On the second day he placed before Gandhi the difficulties in implementing the May 16 Cabinet Declaration, the need for quick action in view of the deteriorating law and order situation, and the uncompromising attitude of Jinnah and his colleagues. He asked for Gandhi's advice. What Gandhi suggested was not new. But on this occasion he was firm, solemn and unequivocal. On earlier occasions he had made similar offers through third parties. On this occasion he made it himself directly to the Viceroy, so that there was no going back and no one could doubt its genuineness and his sincerity. It was an offer which reminded one of the two mothers who claimed the same child. Having failed to determine who was the real mother, Solomon the Just decided to cut the child in two. At this one of the claimants overwhelmed with tears and emotion prayed that the child be given to the other lady who, she swore, was the real mother. Solomon thus discovered the real mother and handed over the child to the one who asked that the life of the child be spared.

He told Mountbatten that under no circumstances should India be partitioned. While hitherto, Gandhi said, he preferred the British to quit first, he was prepared to make an offer if Mountbatten, the man, would agree to serve as a "political umpire". He would ask him "to invite Jinnah to form a government of his choice at the Centre and to present his Pakistan plan for acceptance to his people before the transfer of power. The Congress would give wholehearted support to the Jinnah Government". Mountbatten considered the proposal "extremely generous and constructive".

Mountbatten urged Gandhi to give his proposal a definite formal shape, "so that it could be seriously considered". "It seems attractive," he said. This view was allowed to be widely publicised. Mountbatten knew that in the atmosphere of hate, created by League violence in different parts of the country, such an offer when published was just the one to isolate Gandhi from his own people, provoke the wrath and

antagonism of fire-brand Hindus against him, and paralyse his influence as a force in favour of a united India. Mountbatten as a master of strategist also realized that the more seriously he took Gandhi's proposal, the more he publicly encouraged him, the more Gandhi would feel impressed. At the same time the more apprehensive and antagonistic would his followers feel, at least those who distrusted or hated Jinnah.

Gandhi had his first shock when Lord Ismay, one of the advisers of Mountbatten, sent him a "revised draft" of the points he had outlined to the Viceroy. The Viceroy had said, so Gandhi understood, that Gandhi should give the points of his plan to Lord Ismay to enable him and his draftsmen to elaborate the points and to "prepare a draft agreement". Lord Ismay actually sent back, through Nehru, Gandhi's points, after doing no more than dotting the i's and crossing the t's. This was as usual marked "Top secret and very confidential".

Gandhi was looking forward to making a bold approach to Jinnah and the League after he had obtained Mountbatten's approval and the consent of his colleagues in the Congress. His speeches at prayer meetings had become cryptic. They lent to the hope that another Gandhian miracle was in the offing. Gandhi called for faith in Mountbatten. He was certainly not prepared for what Lord Ismay sent back through Nehru. Profoundly upset, Gandhi wrote to Ismay: "Pandit Nehru gave me what you have described as an outline of a scheme. What I read is merely a copy of the points I hurriedly dictated, whereas I understood from His Excellency the Viceroy that you were to prepare a draft agreement after the lines of the points I had dictated."¹

"There has been some misunderstanding," wrote back Ismay. He explained that he was supposed to prepare not an agreement based on Gandhi's plan, "but a short note summarising its salient features in general terms". Mountbatten confirmed that what Ismay had said accorded with his wishes and understanding.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who had accompanied Gandhi,

¹ Pyarelal, *Mahatma: The Last Phase*, Vol. II, p. 81.

solemnly vouched that what Gandhi had stated had been the Viceroy's clear desire. Gandhi felt cheated and disillusioned. In a long letter recalling exactly what had happened, Gandhi wrote to Lord Ismay : "I can only say that there must be some defect in my understanding or my attentiveness if I misunderstood very simple things." An American yankee might have shouted : "What a bunch of crooks...." but not so Gandhi. The blame lay with his capacity to understand or hear "simple things". Mountbatten was all politeness and declared solemnly that he was "most upset to think that any act or omission on our part should increase the great burden you are carrying". But this was not the unkindest cut.

While the Viceroy was asking Gandhi to elaborate his plan to Ismay, his advisers were saying jokingly that it was the "old kite flown without disguise". On the 5th of April, the day he told Gandhi that he had been attracted by the plan, Mountbatten was describing Gandhi's scheme to his colleagues as similar to the plans of "the phenomenal Mr Pyke, once a scientist at Combined Operations and author of Habakuku, the floating self-propelled airfield made of ice, far-fetched but potentially feasible".²

Before creating the "misunderstanding" Mountbatten had fortified himself with the views of Jinnah, who during his very first dinner with Mountbatten exploded that "Gandhi's position was mischievous", and said that the "Congress wants to inherit everything. They would even accept Dominion Status to deprive me of Pakistan".³

V. P. Menon had privately assured Mountbatten that Vallabhbhai Patel did not at all like the Gandhi scheme and would oppose it if he was consulted by Gandhi. Mountbatten only wanted to be sure about Nehru. Everyone said that Gandhi and Nehru, between themselves, could upset any plan, and that Gandhi still exercised a spell on Nehru. It was argued if that were not the case Gandhi would not have confidently

² Allan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 57.

³ *Ibid.*

guaranteed the support of the Congress if his plan was accepted.

"It was agreed today (April 5)," writes Campbell-Johnson, "that it was essential to make it clear to Nehru, before Gandhi got to work too hard on the Congress, that Mountbatten was far from committed to the Gandhi Plan."⁴ In this help was sought of another Menon, an old-time friend and associate of Nehru, V. K. Krishna Menon. He had recently returned to India to "be close to Nehru" at this critical juncture. V. K. Krishna Menon had left India in the twenties as a student. VKK had occasionally visited India, but had otherwise remained a stranger to Indian public life and politics. He had known Gandhi, but had never come close to him. He was therefore more inclined to be critical of Gandhi, and his outmoded ideas. Equally, there was nothing that Gandhi found was common between his concept of socialism and that of Menon. While Krishna Menon had been an inveterate opponent of British rule, because of his close association with the Labour Party, and because of his essentially British outlook, Mountbatten found in him a useful ally in the Nehru camp. Thus to VKK was entrusted the task of preparing Nehru against being taken in by the Gandhi Plan, since this would only delay matters, and achieve nothing substantial.

Gandhi soon found that he had no supporters. Jinnah thought his plan mischievous. Mountbatten deemed it attractive but "far-fetched". The rightist Hindus believed it to be treacherous. No influential Congressman was prepared to support it. In the Working Committee which met at his request, he found the men who for years had often said yes, even to his wrong suggestions, were not only critical, but harsh and intemperate in their language. Patel left the talking to others, because he had initially told Gandhi that his proposal was more dangerous than anything that had hitherto been suggested.

Abul Kalam, while still talking of the Cabinet Mission plan, could not easily swallow the suggestion that Jinnah and not

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

he should be asked to form the Government. If Jinnah and the League came in, he and his small band of "nationalist Muslims" would be out. With Nehru, Gandhi had separate talks. He struggled with him in the Working Committee but failed to enlist support. Finally, he found Abdul Ghaffar Khan was the only one who supported his plan. He wrote to Mountbatten on April 11:

"I had several short talks with Pandit Nehru and an hour's talk with him alone, and then with several members of the Working Committee last night.... I am sorry to say that I failed to carry any of them with me except Badshah Khan.... I felt sorry that I could not convince them of the correctness of my plan.... Thus I have to ask you to omit me from your consideration."

Gandhi felt that he had now no hold on any one except himself. He was completely and thoroughly disillusioned. He was disappointed in Mountbatten, but not angry with him. It was the attitude of his close associates to his proposal, men who had sacrificed and struggled for Indian freedom at his bidding, comrades who were prepared to lay down their lives for the Khilafat, for Hindu-Muslim unity and for a free united India, that came to him as a shock. He had suffered many shocks and many betrayals during his hectic career. But this betrayal was the worst. It involved the betrayal of the ideals he had purported to serve, the destruction of all that he had endeavoured to create. It seemed a calculated, wilful murder of the spirit he had tried to foster during half a century, and lately at the risk of his life in Noakhali, Calcutta and Bihar.

I went to the prayer meeting after he had written to Mountbatten withdrawing his proposal. Gandhi ordinarily never betrayed his emotions easily. Even though profoundly depressed, he could smile like a child. He did not now smile like a child. He grinned many times, even tried to laugh away his disappointment. But that child-like cheer and boyancy was gone! Mrs Sarojini Naidu, among his top colleagues, was still

one who attended his prayer meetings regularly. When I remarked that Bapu was no longer the same, she said with tears in her eyes—and she was rarely the one to invoke tears—"He is politically dead. He sees in front of him the debris of his life-work. He could make heroes out of clay. But the nation has no need for heroes any more. Still perhaps a greater Gandhi will emerge from the debris—Gandhi the immortal!"

What seemed to hurt Gandhi, besides this open defiance and betrayal, was his complete isolation. A lot of people continued to visit his prayer meetings. But the man who at one time virtually dictated the trend of political activity, who decided every great next step in the struggle, who chose the part each one of the principal actors should play, was hurt when thence onwards he did not even know, except casually from press correspondents or others, what was being planned to give final shape to India's future. He received second-hand reports of discussions at Viceregal lunches, breakfasts and dinners, of talks at newly acquired ministerial mansions or at parties and dinners arranged by the growing family of foreign diplomats. He heard of the "cultural" gaiety that was now overtaking the capital, thanks to the continuous presence of a large number of princes and their Ministers. Whenever he complained that he seemed to be the only person with time hanging on his hands, he was told by his colleagues that the "affairs of State" placed a heavy burden and were too demanding in time and energy.

During this period he was drawn more and more to Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Ghaffar Khan had been travelling in Bihar and other areas with Gandhiji and had returned profoundly perturbed by what he saw. "Hindus and Muslims have behaved like beasts," he said while talking to me. "I am afraid the infection is spreading to the Frontier as well. They will not leave us in peace for long." He was particularly angry with Abul Kalam Azad and his diminishing band of "nationalist Muslims". "There are thousands of Muslims today who are nationalists," he said, "but Maulana will not call them 'nationalist Muslims'."

At this juncture, the small band which was referred to as "nationalist Muslims" were more concerned with seeking or retaining office rather than working among Muslims in the country. In fact they were not enough to fill the offices that had suddenly become available. Speaking about his own worries in the Frontier, he said, "We find ourselves between the 'Jinnah' of the Congress and the Jinnah of the League." Abdul Ghaffar was not the only one to refer to Abul Kalam as the "Jinnah" of the Congress. Vallabhbhai Patel in private conversation often said he would be happy if Abul Kalam opted for Pakistan. Vallabhbhai had finally reached the conclusion that it was better to concede a truncated Pakistan than to agree to the grouping plan of the Cabinet Declaration. Abul Kalam Azad felt deeply committed to the Cabinet Declaration. His only regret was that Nehru and others, under the influence of Gandhi, had qualified their approval, upsetting Jinnah, and offering him an excuse to keep out of the Constituent Assembly. Abdul Ghaffar felt that in the grouping plan the Frontier was left with no choice but to join the Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan in drafting a constitution, from which it could not opt out without the majority vote of the entire group. If Jinnah's Pakistan was conceded, then in a sovereign State consisting of Sind, Baluchistan and West Punjab, the Frontier could either demand the establishment of a Pakhtoonistan with the help of Afghan tribals, or preserve its Pathan identity in the truncated territory. "I can see that sooner or later we of the Frontier will be thrown to the wolves, and it will be the British who will still dominate us, whether we are part of Abul Kalam's group or Jinnah's Pakistan." What annoyed him also was the approach of Abul Kalam at this juncture to the political crisis. "Why doesn't Abul Kalam leave Jawahar and Patel to take care of the Hindus, and work among the Muslims. I find Abul Kalam and his associates today are afraid of the Muslims. It is wrong to assume that the Muslim masses are for Pakistan and partition. They are not. But nobody is there to tell them. Even intelligent Muslims now feel that partition would not solve the communal problem." It was true

that at this time Abul Kalam Azad, who had been one of the greatest orators in Urdu, was more concerned with fighting for concessions from the Congress than for mobilising Muslims who stood for an undivided India. The difference between Abul Kalam and Jinnah at this stage was only this: Abul Kalam wanted the grouping plan as interpreted by the Cabinet. This Jinnah had welcomed and the Congress had rejected. Jinnah, as an alternative, seemed satisfied with a truncated but sovereign Pakistan immediately, which the Congress was inclined to accept.

Mountbatten, having now cleared Gandhi out of the way, decided to play the cards he had been holding up his sleeve. Gandhi, disillusioned, disowned and politically discarded, once again took to becoming a tramp. He left for the ruined fields and charred huts of Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali and Bihar. I had often seen Bapu off. But never before were his smiles so wan and his eyes so moist. The crowd that came to see him off was also the smallest, although for the first time special police arrangements and the presence of a few Ministers and their chaprasis gave it the colour of a V.I.P. departure. A meek voice raised the familiar slogan "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai". The chorus that followed was like a sob!

Bitter-Sweet

"Mr Jinnah! I do not intend to let you wreck all the work that has gone into this settlement. Since you will not accept for the Muslim League, I will speak for them myself. I will take the risk of saying that I am satisfied with the assurances you have given me.... When I say at the meeting in the morning 'Mr Jinnah has given me assurances which I have accepted and which satisfy me', you will under no circumstances contradict. When I look towards you, you will nod your head in acquiescence." Thus spoke Mountbatten to Jinnah on the midnight of June 2, 1947. Jinnah was too obstinate to say "yes". He was also too shrewed to say "no". His reply to this request itself was "to nod his head without any verbal undertaking".¹ All the while his feline eyes gleamed with truculence. His lips opened into a wan smile. He had been the spoilt child of three Viceroys and the pampered political protégé of top European officials and influential European reactionaries in India and England for many years. He did not like being ordered about and commanded to nod "yes". He had started distrusting Mountbatten, despite a letter he had brought from Churchill. He found Mountbatten a greater actor than himself and this in itself made him dislike the man. When Mountbatten said, "They say you always want the Congress to commit itself first, so that you can raise the bid if it suited you," he could have shouted, "This would be libellous in law." Actually, if he was not willing to say "yes"

¹ Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 103.

at Mountbatten's behest, it was because he had also no desire to say "no". He could play with Viceroys, but he could no longer play with Time.

If Gandhi's nonviolence had succeeded in winning freedom for India, Jinnah's strategy of naked violence had now succeeded in making Pakistan a reality. The "pistol" he had forged had worked. As his followers had threatened, the inhuman villanies committed on innocent, unarmed, helpless men, women and children had excelled the dark memories of Halaku and Chengiz Khan, and the massacres of Nadir Shah and Timur the Lame.

The entire top executive of the bureaucracy, Europeans and Muslims, were holding the ring for League hooligans, and were actively helping in promoting disorder. Hand grenades, sten guns and rationed kerosine were secretly being passed on to the League supporters to help organize gangsterism in the country.

Although violence had succeeded to an extent, Jinnah was shrewd enough to realize the dangers of counter-violence. Once the Hindus and the Sikhs started retaliating in force, many Bihars could be repeated. In that case Muslims could get cold feet. Gandhi may or may not live for long. His presence was a great help to Muslims where they were in a minority. He gave them a sense of security. If Hindus indulged in massive retaliation, with Gandhi gone, the Muslims in minority areas may begin to actually oppose Pakistan since nearly eight crores of them would still have to make India their permanent home. They would not like to live as hostages, even if Jinnah wanted them to. He therefore could not keep the advantage for long.

Above all, Jinnah was becoming more and more anxious about his own health. He was losing strength and power of speech. Doctors would not tell him his ailment, but he knew he was suffering from some serious pulmonary disease. He had chronic spasms of cough and sometimes even spat blood clots with his sputum. He had chest pains and had breathing difficulty. He was losing appetite. One day, after tea, he

remarked to me: "I eat no more than the Mahatma. But I am not like him a humbug. I still like the good things of life." Rumour had it that Jinnah's symptoms indicated cancer. Before his followers came to know of his illness, and intimates started hustling for succession, he wanted to see the establishment of Pakistan. That is why he agreed to "nod" assent while making no verbal affirmation. He was the only stumbling-block left for a final move towards division. By this subtle manoeuvre Mountbatten had removed it.

The Congress attitude had been unexpectedly realistic. Mountbatten's plan stood on one pivotal base, namely the Congress, the Muslim League and the princes all agreeing, even if there was to be division, to live under the common umbrella of the Commonwealth. The Cabinet mission plan was based on "independence"—any part or the whole, however, having the option of remaining as a dominion in the Commonwealth. Mountbatten had been warned by Sir Stafford Cripps and Pethwick Lawrence that Nehru and his colleagues would accept nothing short of full, complete and unqualified independence. Since Dominion Status was pivotal to Mountbatten's new plan, he could not go further till he had won over Nehru.

To overcome this hurdle, he invited Nehru to Simla to stay as his personal guest. The Viceregal Lodge, built on the design of a rugged castle, lay on a peak overlooking, on all sides, the eternal snowline. In its extensive flowerbeds grew some of the finest and rarest flowers in the world. It offered dark, shady bridle paths and extensive footpaths for seclusion and recreation. Nehru loved vigorous walks and was still passionately devoted to riding. He liked the company of intelligent and attractive ladies. All this afforded just the atmosphere to enable Nehru to relax, "to take his mind off the complicated problems that vexed him and to react to broader matters of policy."

Nehru arrived on May 8. Mountbatten at the same time received surprising support to his plans from an unexpected quarter. Krishna Menon, who had now become Nehru's

closest adviser, accompanied him to Simla. Krishna Menon, when approached at a "tea and more tea" breakfast to which Mountbatten invited him, not only felt attracted to the idea of maintaining some kind of unity under the Commonwealth umbrella and accelerating the process of transfer of power, but actually agreed to sell it to Nehru as "his own." It had struck him a few months earlier as a preferable solution, he said. Krishna Menon kept his word.

The second helpful source was the other Menon. V. P. Menon through the years, in one post or another, had come to know more about constitutional matters than any other Indian in the Government. To Mountbatten his advice was invaluable, since he had the ear of Vallabhbhai Patel. For Patel he was a good guide. He had the inner knowledge of all the thinking in the Reforms Office under four Viceroys since the twenties. He not only prepared Vallabhbhai for the new plan, but also got a private assurance that if Nehru agreed, Vallabhai would accept.

Late after dinner one night, Mountbatten revealed to Nehru the plan he had sent to the British Cabinet for consideration. It was like flying a test kite. Nehru reacted fiercely.² But this would mean Balkanization, he said. He would have nothing to do with it. This did not bother Mountbatten. What surprised him was that Nehru raised little objection about India preserving the Commonwealth link. After Krishna Menon had discussed the merits of early freedom and V. P. Menon had placed before Nehru the details of the amended plan, Nehru changed completely and began to look on the bright side of things. The brightest to him was, early achievement of independence by India minus Pakistan, the exercise by the Congress and by him as the Prime Minister, of full control over India, an end to the political stalemate, to insults and bickerings in the Interim Government, goodbye to Jinnah and his tantrums, freedom to build up at least a major part of the country along the lines of socialism and democracy. He offered little objection to the Commonwealth tie, but insisted that

² According to Mountbatten's biographer Campbell Johnson.

the Constituent Assembly should continue. Mountbatten agreed.

The consent of Congress leaders had come more easily than Mountbatten expected. He was apprehensive that Nehru who had fought for the "goal of independence" twenty years ago would not accept Dominion Status. Even if this hurdle was overcome, Mountbatten and his advisers felt that Congress would not consent to an election or a plebiscite in the Frontier,³ as this would be letting down the Red Shirts, who among Muslims, perhaps represented the largest and truest body of devout patriots in the country. It was extremely doubtful if the Frontier Red Shirts and the Khan Brothers would be cast to the wolves! And yet, in essence this was implicit in the new plan, which asked for a referendum in the Frontier. "Why the Frontier?" asked the Khan Brothers. No one had the answer. Nehru had scarcely protested! The letting-down of the Red Shirts in this manner was not an act of carelessness on the part of Congress leaders, nor even a blunder, but an act of gross and unpardonable betrayal!

Soon after "bagging" Nehru, Mountbatten left for England to get the approval of his new plan from His Majesty's Government. He got its consent, and in the bargain, through a clever appeal to Commonwealth loyalty, also bagged Churchill. This was almost a political "hat-trick". He returned on the 1st of June to meet next day three leaders of the Congress, Nehru, Patel and Kripalani, and three of the League, Jinnah, Liaquat and Abdul Rab Nishtar, with Baldev Singh to represent the Sikhs. Originally he wanted to confine the number to five. Congress, however, insisted that Kripalani who had then become Congress President must be invited. Jinnah wanted to balance the representation and threw in Nishtar into the scales. There was always some suggestive meaning in these seemingly off-hand political manoeuvres of Jinnah. In asking for a third representative, he proved a stickler for the principle of parity between the League and the Congress. In putting Nishtar, a

³An election had been held only a few months earlier, returning the Red Shirts in a solid majority.

frontier Pathan who had lost in the last election and who was never thought of much in the League as a leader, he was only giving his assessment of the status of Kripalani in the Congress. Kripalani had been an ardent Congressman since the early twenties but he did not have the calibre of earlier Congress Presidents. But since Nehru and Patel then wanted someone who would toe the line, and act as a figure-head till a new policy had emerged, Kripalani was elected over the heads of many very senior candidates. By seating Nishtar as the opposite number of Kripalani, Jinnah cleverly brought down the prestige of the Congress on the one hand and raised his own status, as League President, on the other. He sat as the opposite number of Nehru. He was even asked to stay over after the others had left, this was a special favour shown to him to make up for a separate interview granted to Gandhi.

These were small matters but they counted a lot in those days. They counted even more since in the case of Mountbatten every gesture, every move, every step, had a meaning and a purpose, and was carefully pre-rehearsed, or atleast was pre-meditated. Even in the distribution of cars, great care had been taken to combine patronage with protocol. Large American cars for the "big guns" and small English cars for the lesser fry. There were many large conference rooms in Viceroy's House. Mounthatten chose the smallest. He also chose a round table. This was to lend a sense of continuity to earlier efforts at settling the Indian problem around "round table" conferences. As the seven leaders sat waiting for the Viceroy, they scarcely exchanged either smiles or greetings. Any talk, if at all, was addressed more to the journalists and the cameramen than to each other. Even Mounthatten failed to enliven the atmosphere. In a 45-minute business like speech he placed his new proposals as accepted by His Majesty's Government before the meeting. By the midnight of the 2nd he wanted the leaders to send in their formal acceptance. This ruled out any rejection. The acceptance on behalf of the Congress was sent by Kripalani. Jinnah met Mountbatten personally before midnight. It was then that in the absence of a

formal acceptance by his Working Committee he agreed to "nod". Thus by a nod the fate of India was sealed!

Curiously enough, though the League had ostensibly not sent a formal acceptance, the League leaders and their younger lieutenants were the only ones to go on a binge, in celebration of the creation of Pakistan. Prayers were offered, sweets were distributed and many of the younger enthusiasts arranged dinners and banquets to which those European and Muslim officials who had specially helped in "Operation Pakistan" were invited.

The Hindus responded by a sort of cold numbness, seeing nothing to be jubilant about and finding suddenly that those who till recently had deemed partition fatal for India had become its most ardent apologists.

Nehru had mixed feelings. But he had to be the first official apologist on behalf of the Congress. Mountbatten arranged that on the 3rd, after the formal acceptance of the plan, he, Nehru and Jinnah should make brief broadcasts. Nehru had hitherto many broadcasts to his credit. But this broadcast, made on the most momentous occasion in national history, was the poorest. One could feel that Nehru was as confused in his words as he was about his feelings. The plan announced that day, he said, "envisages on the one hand the possibility of these areas (defined as Pakistan) seceding from India" (a polite way of referring to "Operation scuttle"—and the use of "possibility" for "certainty" seemed significant) "and on the other it promises a big advance towards complete independence." Having said this, his heart must have missed a beat for he said: "It is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals to you."

An unusually large audience had turned up at Gandhi's prayer meeting. The news of the Congress leaders having agreed to partition had already spread like wild fire. People noted that Gandhi had been invited to meet Mountbatten separately. In him perhaps lay their only hope; India's unity hung by a thread! June 2 happened to be a Monday. The interview which Mountbatten had dreaded most that day was

the one with Gandhi. Even Nehru did not know what Gandhi's "inner voice" may finally decide for him. Gandhi had often stated that India would not be partitioned so long as he was alive. Even if he was alive, he had said, he would fight to the last. India was now being partitioned. What would the Mahatma do? "Imagine his amazement and relief," writes Alan Campbell-Johnson, the biographer of Mountbatten, "when the Mahatma blandly indicated on the back of various used envelopes and other scraps of paper that he was observing his day of silence." The sting lay in his explanation of the vow of "Monday silence". Wrote Gandhi: "When I took the decision about the Monday silence, I did make two exceptions, i.e. about speaking to high functionaries on urgent matters, or attending upon sick people." Mountbatten was not a sick person, but he was certainly at the time a "high functionary". The obvious suggestion was that the subject of their interview, according to Gandhi, was not of "urgent importance" to necessitate an "exception".

On the 2nd of June, Gandhi wrote his first article of a series for *The Harijan*. Every signed article by Gandhi for *The Harijan* was news and was telegraphed to the newspapers in extenso. This was more so, since it had been written on the historic 2nd of June, and was to run in series. The series was headed: "Things of eternal value!" Its main thesis was *Brahmacharya*: "full control over the process of reproduction".

In the prayer meeting Gandhi for the first time directly referred to the vivisection of India that had been decided upon. Instead of showing opposition, he appealed to the people to accept it. "It was the willing act of the Congress and the Muslim League," he said. He admitted that he differed from the Working Committee, but having stated the fact, he "would commend their decision for acceptance". When someone reminded him that he had once said, "the vivisection of India would mean a vivisection of myself," Gandhi replied, "when I made the statement, I was voicing public opinion." He added: "But when public opinion was against me, was I to coerce it?" The fact was that public opinion was still against

vivisection. It had been coerced by the terrorist tactics of the League, supported by reactionary officials, and the impatience of the top leaders within the Congress.

While this is what Gandhiji said publicly, in private conversation to us, he was as wrathful as only Gandhi could ever be. "The work of half a century has been undone," he said. "I see nothing but raging fires and rivers of blood before me. This means complete ruination (*sarv naash*)!" His cheeks glowed for the first time like burning coals. His eyes revealed a raging tempest he was trying to control. His hands shook nervously. "I cannot blame the Viceroy. He stood for a united India till the last. I cannot blame Jinnah. Perhaps we did not do enough to allay his fears. I cannot blame my own people. Obviously they had no choice."

In a later speech he said, "If only the non-Muslims had been with me I would have shown the way to undo partition." But when in the meeting of the AICC on June 12 a storm of dissent arose against the leaders, Gandhi asked the dissidents if "they had the strength to take over the reins of the Congress and Government?" When someone suggested they would follow, if he would lead, Gandhi averred, "Well, I have no strength to do it." The voice of opposition was thus silenced. Gandhi went back to Bengal and Bihar to put down the blazing fires of communal violence.

Mountbatten with the precision of a great commander had a calendar prepared, indicating date-wise every step that was to precede the handing-over of the charge of the administration to the national governments of India and Pakistan. He moved with the ruthlessness of a road-roller and the efficiency of a robot to implement the programme of transfer.

29

Freedom! Blood, Tears and Revelry

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny.... At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance." Nehru spoke thus just before the hour of midnight had struck. Thirty-one guns boomed to herald the birth of a free India. All members of the Constituent Assembly, specially called for a midnight session, rose in their seats to take a solemn pledge of dedicated service to the motherland. India was legally, politically and constitutionally free!

Outside, there was thunder and lightning—a cloudburst was followed by a sharp drizzle. Thousands had collected in and around the precincts of Council House. As the clock struck the midnight hour, they rent the sky with deafening cheers—*"Inquilab Zindabad!"* *"Gandhi ki jai, Nehru ki jai, Jai Hind!"* Some even shouted *"Mountbatten Zindabad!"* The crowd went almost mad with joy and excitement.

It was past eleven when I along with a party of local officers reached the Council Chamber. Reports had come from a Hindu locality near the Nizamuddin railway station that a concentration of Muslims was planning to blow up the station and the railway track that night. According to another secret

message, Muslim families living in a pocket in Karol Bagh surrounded by Hindu refugees from the Punjab had been told that they and their houses would be turned into a bonfire, "to celebrate the coming of independence". There had been serious tension in the Capital for days before the fifteenth of August. League volunteers, paid hooligans and gangsters and other anti-social elements had created pockets, both in and outside the old city, and cells where fire arms, hand grenades, bombs, spears, spikes, daggers and all kinds of weapons of violence had been collected. The latest League cry had become: "*Hans ke Liye hai Pakistan, Lar ke lenge Hindustan*".¹ Fanatical mullas preached the doctrine of hate during Friday prayers and told their audiences that for centuries Muslims had ruled Delhi, and, "*Inshah Allah*", they will do so again.

Only one who knows old Delhi well can realize how easy it was to build up and preserve these cells, especially when there were a lot of high officials willing to help with supplies. Even in such an outlandish area as Nizamuddin, where lived for three hundred years or more a settlement of Muslims owing allegiance to the tradition of religious tolerance and amity of great Muslim saints like Nizammudin Aulia and Amir Khusro, more than one such cell existed. The existence of these cells, and the provocative preachings of fanatical mullas, created among the Hindus genuine anxiety and concern, and increased suspicion and distrust between the communities.

From the Punjab, Sind and the North-West Frontier, thousands of helpless, homeless, penniless families had been pouring into the Capital. Among these thousands were men who were millionaires till yesterday, and were now paupers, searching for food and shelter. They brought stories of burnt homes, of murder, savage assaults of plunder and incendiarism. They had witnessed their own kith and kin butchered in cold blood, their babies cast into burning flames like footballs, their women publicly raped and then torn to pieces. They had seen their daughters and wives committing suicide to prevent molestation.

Kahuta was a little nature's paradise, thirty-odd miles from

¹ "We have got Pakistan by right. We will take Hindustan by force."

Rawalpindi. I had often visited it. A hill stream girdled the little town. At one place the main street suddenly ended in a buff rock where the placid waters of the torrent gurgled over marble white boulders. Here the women of the village, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, among them some of the prettiest with the most shapely and graceful bodies, came with their pitchers to collect water for their homes. In the main street, Muslim farmers from the neighbouring hills brought wool sheared from their sheep, cheese, vegetables, fruits, grain on camels, mules and donkeys, and made barter deals for cloth, shoes, home utensils, provisions, ploughs and harrows with Sikh, Hindu and Muslim traders. Near the bazar was a Sikh gurdwara. Almost adjoining it, a mosque. The elders often sat together under a grove of banyan trees, discussing common problems, sharing each other's joys and sorrows and dispensing justice where social offenders were concerned. Molestation of women had been practically unknown.

While Jinnah had publicly endorsed a joint statement with Gandhi, appealing for communal amity, privately the League leaders had circulated a master plan, which encouraged, by implication, wherever and in whatever manner possible, violence, coercion, conversion, loot, incendiarism or terror of any kind, the expulsion of Hindus and the Sikhs out of Pakistan. "Pak" meant pure. Pakistan could not be pure unless the "infidels" were driven out. An infidel's wife, daughter, property, etc. were all permissive, said the Mullahs, if the object was to "punish or expel him". These sermons of hate had become a regular feature of mosque prayers. A wave of terror had spread to all the towns and villages of the Punjab.

The tidal bore reached Kahuta. One bright day when the fields were green with vegetation, and the most extraordinary flowers bloomed wild from between the cliffs, the Muslims held a conference and decided to "purify" the village. The local executive officer,² the head of the small police force, even the post master, all Muslims, joined the conference. The Hindus and Sikhs got alarmed. They called for outside help. The post

² Tehsildar.

master suppressed all their SOS messages. At a fixed hour, Muslim gunmen went up the towers of the mosque, occupied several places of vantage on the surrounding rocks, and held the town practically at gun point. A few volleys were fired to create terror. Hidden gangs then ran into the town sprinkling petrol and kerosene, setting houses and shops on fire. Then followed a whole cavalcade of trucks, camels, mules, horses, donkeys and bullock-carts in which the Muslims, some of them the most respectable in the neighbourhood, began filling the booty from Hindu homes. Most of the Hindu and Sikh residents were killed. Some who accepted conversion were allowed to go, but only after all they had was seized. Those with any influence selected their "pick" of pretty girls. The rest were left to the goondas to rape, abduct or marry, or to treat as "booty". Many girls and women committed suicide. They threw themselves in the neighbouring stream where it was a hundred feet deep. Some burnt themselves by collecting their beddings, cots and other belongings, and setting fire to them. Some drowned themselves in a well. Within a few days the more influential had occupied the houses of the better-class Hindus and Sikhs and taken control of their fields. The less influential became shopkeepers and tradesmen, and the village had become "Pak" (pure).

Pakistan celebrated her independence a day earlier, i.e. on the 14th. Actually, August 14 was fixed by Parliament for India, Pakistan and the princely states to assume their sovereign status within the Commonwealth. At some stage the date was referred to the astrologers. The top Pandits of Banaras and the South were unanimous that August 14th was highly inauspicious. There was a menacing confluence of three planets inimical to India. They felt that it might be better to tolerate the British for one more day than risk eternal damnation. It was in one of these lighter perplexities that Mountbatten seriously discussed the desirability of adding an expert astrologer to his retinue of advisers, since in many matters he had to face difficulties created by the stars. Pakvasa, who had been appointed Governor of C.P., for example, refused

to take charge on the 15th as the stars did not encourage travelling on the 14th.

To satisfy the astrologers, and at the same time to avoid legal and constitutional difficulties, the legal wizards decided to hold a midnight session and announce India's freedom one minute after the 14th, expecting that the stars in the meantime would have moved to propitious locations.

The decision by Pakistan to be free on the 14th without the aid of astrologers suited Mountbatten. It enabled him to fly to Karachi on the 14th and return to Delhi for the midnight celebrations. There was one thing, however, about the celebrations in Pakistan which Mountbatten did not like. When he had propounded the plan of a divided India and Pakistan under the Commonwealth, he almost assumed that Pakistan would invite him to become the first Governor-General. At the same time he fervently hoped that Nehru and his Government might also see the wisdom of having a joint Governor-General. Nehru and his Government surprised him by taking the initiative in recommending his name to His Majesty's Government. Jinnah shocked him by putting forward his own name, disregarding any need for advice or consultation. His "followers", he pleaded, insisted that he should be their first Governor-General. A few days later his "followers" also insisted that his official title should be what he had hitherto appropriated for himself—Qaid-e-Azam. He became one by statute.

Jinnah left on August 7 for Karachi, ostensibly leaving his palatial house on Aurangzeb Road with all its modern and costly furniture behind "at the mercy of the future Indian Government". Actually, he took no chances. He sold the property to a rich Marwari with vast business interests in Pakistan at a fabulous price. He had already engaged his personal staff and, soon after entering the residence of the future Governor-General in Karachi, began preparations to make it worthy of his "regal" taste, status and position. The garden had to be looked after more carefully, he directed, and the approaches widened. "This wing will be occupied only by me and Miss

Jinnah," he pointed out to his ADC. He gave detailed instructions as to the alterations that had to be made. When the security officials wanted the wing to be protected by a wall, Jinnah firmly rejected the idea. "No walls please; I am one of the People!"³

After the assassination of Gandhi, a few months later, he allowed a "double" wall to be erected. There was another wing. This "only for very important people," he said. "I don't wish to have Governors of Provinces or Ministers in these rooms." They can be accommodated on the ground floor. "Only very important people," he emphasised, "like the Shah of Persia or the King of England."

At the very time, on the 15th of August, when Nehru and his Cabinet were being sworn in by Mountbatten in the marbled rotunda of the Viceroy's House in New Delhi, Jinnah, the first Governor-General of Pakistan, was administering the oath to Liaquat Ali and his Cabinet, with full ceremonial dignity and studied formality. He was the first Asiatic to be appointed Governor-General and he wanted to show that he and Pakistan were worthy of the choice. He appeared on this occasion, as on arrival at the airport, in a white-silk *achkan*, gracefully buttoned up to the neck, fitting immaculately at the waist. He wore a pair of loose white trousers, whose folds had been carefully pressed. On his head he wore a gray fur cap. It became the official head-dress of West Pakistan. The inevitable monocle hung conveniently to be used when reading his address. His hands had been carefully manicured. He was proud of his hands and his shapely tapering fingers. After the Cabinet members had assembled and guests had taken their seats, the Governor-General, led by his ADCs in uniform and his secretary, followed by his bodyguards, moved step by step down the stairs. He went up to the balcony and paused for a while, looking at the audience assembled in the compound and the crowds beyond. "I never expected to see Pakistan in my lifetime," he remarked. "We have to be grateful to God." And then the procession moved on into the open.

³ Boelitho, Jinnah.

The ceremony was brief, formal and impressive. Jinnah returned solemnly to his room. He looked in the full mirror on the opposite wall and smiled to himself the smile of satisfaction. The *Qaid-e-Azam* was "King"! Pakistan may have got moth-eaten and truncated in the process, but it was still the largest Muslim country in the world! And this was just the beginning! If his plans succeeded, he reflected, it may within a decade perhaps become still larger, bringing many satellite rulers around his throne. The names "Hyderabad, Kashmir, Junagadh, Bhopal, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Tonk, Pataudi, Bhavalpur, Chitral" sounded suggestive. It was not his new Prime Minister who called next on that day, but this doctor. He did feel tired and exhausted! Would he be given the ten years he wanted? The doctor felt worried.

While these official ceremonies were going on in both countries and large crowds in the two capitals were milling about in wild ecstasy to wear off the first exuberance of independence, a two-way traffic had been established across the Punjab and Sind border. Caravans of refugees had started moving between India and Pakistan. They moved in their thousands and tens of thousands, till the total reached hundreds of thousands. They moved with whatever belongings they could carry on hired trucks, bullock carts, horses, mules and donkeys. Young men carried old women in relays. They carried children in gunny sacks. Among them were the rich and the very poor, the healthy and the maimed. In many cases, they trekked three to five hundred miles, with hardly any food, with no arrangements for clean water, searching from city to city, camp to camp, for a place to shelter from rain and the sun. New babies were born on the roadside. Infants died of thirst and hunger. Appalled by the distress of their children, mothers were known even to offer urine to appease their thirst. Men chewed grass leaves just to keep off thirst and hunger.

On August 15, the Lahore railway station "became a scene of wholesale carnage". According to one eye-witness, there was a continuous rain of bullets. In this the army, the police and a whole lot of hooligans freely joined. "All that was visible of

the city was a huge tower of smoke." On the night of the 15th a train arrived in Amritsar with dead and charred bodies. Outside on the carriages were inscribed the words: "Independence gift to Nehru and Patel."

Before reaching Council House, I went with a couple of fellow Congress leaders and senior executive officials on a general round of the city, because of disturbing reports. Quiet prevailed all over the walled city. Except for official cars, there was practically no traffic. Muslim pockets had been mostly vacated and several thousand Muslim refugees were concentrated in the Old Fort. In the Jama Masjid area, which was exclusively Muslim, life and business were normal, except that many had retired rather unusually early for "Independence Day". The deserted streets conveyed the sign "not interested".

In Karol Bagh, where a large concentration of refugees lived near a disturbed Muslim pocket, we met Hindu and Sikh volunteers armed with lathis, daggers and swords, holding watch. They expected an armed attack by the Muslims. Dozens had stationed themselves on house-tops with rifles and shot-guns. The Muslims did attack. But before the "gang" could do any damage to property, the vigilant volunteers had rounded them up, exposed them to severe beating, and handed them over to the police. As our party reached the police station where the gang was being questioned, we found that they were actually eight or nine Sikhs who had lost their way searching for the gurdwara.⁴ They were the vanguard of a large contingent of refugees which was following and were to take shelter for the night in the gurdwara. They belonged to the thousands of Sikhs and Hindus who had escaped from Pakistan by camouflaging themselves as Muslims. They had cut their hair short, trimmed their beards Muslim-style, had adopted Muslim dress, Muslim ways and Muslim rituals. The Hindus had grown whiskers and beards Muslim-style, could read the Kalma like any Muslim, and could plead, even if identified, that they were neo-converts. Some had even undergone circumcision.

⁴ A Sikh temple.

Looking back, I have often wondered whether this orgy of murder, rape and loot could not have been avoided. Even if division was inevitable, was an orderly exchange of populations and properties not possible? Those in charge of the Union Government at the dawn of independence were overtaken by a storm they had not anticipated. They blundered into one wrong step after another till the deluge of violence lost its force through a sense of surfeit, or abated by a mounting threat of retaliation.

When Mountbatten put forward his plan to advance the date of independence from December, 1948 to August, 1947, his strongest argument was that this would preserve the germs of future unity and insure peaceful and orderly transfer of power to the two Governments without serious dislocation of populations. When warned that already "there had been riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, Bombay and the Punjab" and that if the country was divided in such an atmosphere "there would be rivers of blood flowing in different parts of the country", Mountbatten had confidently replied: "At least on one question I shall give you complete assurance. I shall see to it that there is no bloodshed and riot. I am a soldier, not a civilian... If there should be the slightest agitation... I will order the Army and the Air Force to act, and I will use tanks and aeroplanes to suppress anybody who wants to create trouble."⁵

Much has been said in praise of Mountbatten's skill, tact and administrative ability. But so far as this phase of events is concerned, he showed poor judgment, utter lack of capacity to do the right thing at the right time, and complete unawareness of the ugly, dangerous and deceitful part many of his own responsible European colleagues in the Government were playing to add fuel to the fire, and to create conditions fatal to the implementation of his declared intentions and policies. The most unfortunate factor in the whole situation was that Nehru and Patel, bewildered by what had happened, left too much at the time in the hands of Mountbatten.

Mountbatten, by the consent of both Governments, had set

⁵ Azad, India Wins Freedom.

up a boundary force to preserve peace and order on the two sides of the frontier. Sir Claude Auchinleck was appointed Joint Commander. The two forces on each side of the border were under separate British Commanders. I had known Sir Claude as a very fine officer, an amiable gentleman, and a good host. But I was also aware that the Commander-in-Chief's personal and private affairs were being run by his Muslim aides, whose intense loyalty to Pakistan had become notorious. Top European Army officers were known to be Pakistan-oriented. Reports reached us that the boundary force was not acting impartially. Some of the officers were openly favouring Pakistan. Apart from the boundary force, there was the regular army. This had been broken up into Muslim and Non-Muslim. A large part of the Hindu and Sikh contingents were locked up in the northern Cantonments. But "someone" managed to permit free operation to the Baluchi regiment which, along with the Muslim police, was indulging in diabolical crimes. We journalists tried to bring all these reports to the notice of Nehru and Patel. We could not shake them out of their faith in the sound judgment of Mountbatten and the integrity of the Army. Nehru even resented "any attempt at panic". Sardar Patel warned against any suggestion that the services were not doing their duty faithfully. We, however, could not distrust the sources of our reports.

One day I received a call from the Viceroy's House that Lord Mountbatten would like to meet me. On arrival, I found Devdas Gandhi, then Managing Editor of *The Hindustan Times*, also there. Campbell-Johnson ushered us in. The Viceroy put on an air of grave resentment as we entered. After exchange of formal greetings, he referred to the reports appearing in my paper and *The Hindustan Times* about the questionable role of the boundary force, the crimes of the Baluchi Regiment, the failure of Auchinleck as Joint-Commander, and the sinister atmosphere in the Commander's House. "I will not tolerate," said Mountbatten, "any such attacks on responsible officers of His Majesty's forces. In this I have the fullest support of my Cabinet." A great actor as he was, Mountbatten

could almost look ferocious, if he so wanted. Before we could say anything, Mountbatten concluded his brief, well-prepared speech by saying, "And now may I inform you that I have the Prime Minister's and the Deputy Prime Minister's permission to get you placed under arrest, unless I receive satisfactory assurances that this sinister propaganda will stop." Then with a dramatic pause, he said, "Gentlemen, have I your assurances?"

Devdas and I had a natural conflict of interests as Editors of rival papers. But where national interests were concerned, we always acted in complete accord. By a silent gesture we decided to catch the bull by the horns. We told Mountbatten that even when the Army was an "imperialist" force, we had observed the convention of avoiding any attacks on His Majesty's officers or forces. We had both known Claude Auchenleck during the war, and had great personal regard for him and many of his colleagues. What therefore we had written was not out of malice, but because we were prompted by a sense of public duty. Both of us put before Mountbatten a volume of authentic evidence to prove to him how much graver and more serious was the truth, and how little of it had been published in the papers. He was shocked. He was a changed man. He asked us to send him all further information we may get and to trust him to take corrective action, but to avoid publication of these reports. Soon after, we learnt that Sir Claude Auchenleck had ceased to be in joint command, and the boundary force had been disbanded.

During this interview, which Campbell-Johnson has briefly reported, we made certain positive suggestions to Mountbatten, which he carefully noted. Most of these he considered eminently practicable. He promised to place them before the joint committee of Ministers. We found later that the suggestions were accepted, but in each case the Government had caught the wrong end of the stick. We had suggested that the armed forces and the civil services should be the last to be separated or transferred. Instead of making empty appeals to people to stay on in their homes, arrangements should be

made for orderly evacuation and safe exchange.

As a first step we suggested that islands of safety should be created on both sides, from the village up to the district and even at divisional and provincial level, where Indian and Pakistani troops, police and officials should exercise "joint control", to insure safe evacuation, the freezing of the property of emigrants pending their return, if they so desired, or listing their property and the assessed price for safe custody till appropriate disposal. We discovered later that islands were created, but they were placed under the charge of Muslim Army men, police and officers in Pakistan who took away more than they left with the emigrants. They refused to register or assess properties properly. In fact they compelled the emigrants to make forced sales on threat of losing everything. These islands became places of concentrated loot and coercion. As regards emigration we were informed that "ten lakhs" had already been sanctioned to look after those who might be "dislocated from their homes". But "ten lakhs" would be nothing, we pleaded. You will need crores. "Let us not be alarmists, and let us not create a scare. I feel that both sides will act firmly, and the exodus will stop," Mountbatten optimistically told us. Despite this assurance, the deluge continued unchecked, the Government proceeded from one blunder to another. While within a few weeks a great deal was done to stop the exodus of Muslims, the Hindus continued to be driven out.

The day of independence dawned differently on a deserted, old-fashioned, derelict building called Hydari Manzil in Balia-ghata, a filthy, congested district of Calcutta where Hindus and Muslims lived in overlapping pockets.

The Manzil belonged to a Muslim family. It was built, like so many other old-style middle-class homes, with a large entrance, leading to a spacious courtyard, surrounded by a large verandah and small rooms. It had the distinction of having a lavatory since this was unusual in that locality. It had glass panes on doors and windows. The Manzil showed signs of recent repairs, although part of it, like some other

houses in the neighbourhood, was in shambles. Here some strangers had come, seeking temporary residence—one of them was Gandhi. The other, a large, corpulent, hulk of a man, his face bloated and pock-marked, his eyes alert like that of a cat was Shahid Suhrawardy. He was Bengal's Chief Minister during the great Calcutta killing. The two became "strange bedfellows" under this roof.

Gandhi had been to Kashmir in early August. He then visited strife-torn Rawalpindi and Lahore on return. Here he heard many harrowing stories of terrible happenings. He wanted to help the Khan Brothers who had been thrown to the vultures after the Congress agreed to a referendum. When leaving Lahore on August 6, Gandhi had said: "The rest of my life is going to be spent in East Bengal or West Punjab, perhaps the Frontier Province." He did not even mention Delhi. He reached Calcutta on August 7. He found Hindu-Muslim relations again under a terrible strain. This time he said, "Hindus seem to have gone mad, not that the Muslims had become wiser." Since Calcutta had been declared by the Boundary Commission as part of India, the Muslim police and Muslim officials had been withdrawn. Muslims were scared about what may happen on the 15th and had even decided to observe it as a day of mourning. Muslim leaders urged Gandhi to stop a few days in Calcutta, use his influence to restore confidence among Muslims, before proceeding to Noakhali. Gandhi agreed. He hit upon a novel but daring plan. If he and a Muslim leader, Hindus hated most, could get together under one roof, unprotected by the police or the army, and open to violent attacks by the Hindus or the Muslims, the whole outlook might change.

Shahid Suhrawardy was in Karachi in the beginning of August. He had gone to negotiate his political future in Pakistan. He expected either to be chosen Deputy Prime Minister next to Liaquat or Chief Minister of East Pakistan. He found Jinnah, the Governor-General, very different to Jinnah, the League leader. Jinnah now wanted men who could create confidence and not men with a dark record of organized

butchery. He therefore preferred Nazimuddin, a quieter, cleaner and less violent man, Shahid's former rival in Bengal, as Deputy Prime Minister. In East Bengal he wanted a henchman and not a rival. He selected a local team of moderate Muslims to constitute his hand-picked Cabinet in East Pakistan. Shahid felt betrayed. At this very time the news reached him that Gandhi had left for Calcutta, *en-route* to Noakhali. He remembered the old adage, "Hitch your wagon to a star", and made a dash to Calcutta. Here he found that a role had already been prepared for him by destiny. Gandhi felt that there was no one with a record as bad as that of Suhrawardy, and that he was the best person to provoke the wrath of the Hindus, if his experiment was to succeed. Suhrawardy had come just in time and in the correct mood for venturing whole-heartedly on the experiment—grave risks notwithstanding!

When the Mayor of Calcutta, Mohammed Usman, and other Muslim leaders came to him on August 10 to make a final request to delay his departure to Noakhali, he agreed, provided two conditions were fulfilled. If he did not go to Noakhali, the Muslim leaders should guarantee peace in that area. If something serious happened to the Hindus, he said, "my life would be forfeit and you will have to face a fast unto death on my part". The assurance was given. He then suggested that he and Suhrawardy should live under one roof, like friends, "without any secrets and without police or army protection". The derelict Hydari Manzil was chosen.

When Gandhi arrived, an excited crowd of young men greeted him with shouts of "Go back!" "Why have you come here?" "Where were you during the Calcutta killings?" and so forth. Gandhi greeted them with folded hands and asked them to be patient with him. Then Suhrawardy arrived. The young men surrounded his car. They raised angry shouts, called him "murderer", "butcher", etc. Gandhi intervened and Suhrawardy entered safely. Meanwhile, the crowd became arger and more excited. Some young men started climbing the windows, stones were hurled at them by the crowd. The glass of the window panes was flying all around the room. Soon

there was no glass pane left in the windows. Fortunately, no one was hurt. While all this commotion was going on, Gandhi was reading and chuckling over a message received from Sardar Patel.⁶ "So you have got detained in Calcutta and that too in a quarter which is a veritable shambles and a notorious den of gangsters and hooligans?" He looked at Suhrawardy who had spread himself on the mattress with his legs thrown in front of him, his back resting on a large pillow, his necktie unloosened, his shirt-collar open, his sleeves rolled up, like a jerk, looking bewildered. He read on: "And in what choice company too. It is a terrible risk!"

Gandhi had once asked Suhrawardy: "Why do they call you a goonda⁷?" Just then he believed Suhrawardy was feeling a political orphan. Gandhi invited some of the representatives of the demonstrators and explained to them how by staying with Suhrawardy under the same roof he hoped to preserve peace in Noakhali and "serve not only Muslims, but Hindus, Muslims and all alike". Gradually the excitement outside died down, and the crowd began to melt. Those who had come to smite returned to ponder and reflect.

On the 14th evening Gandhi held his prayer meeting in the open in the compound of Hydari Manzil. "India will be free after midnight," he said, "but also will emerge partitioned. While tomorrow will be a day of rejoicing, it will be a day of sorrow as well.... If millions of Hindus and Muslims are at daggers drawn with one another in Calcutta, with what face can I go to Noakhali?... And if the flames of communal strife envelop the whole country, how can a new-born freedom survive?" Many in the crowd were deeply moved and some said: "What a spell-binder this old man is!"⁸

Soon afterwards a whole gang of excited young men surrounded Hydari Manzil wanting to murder Suhrawardy. Seeing that he had earlier not come to the prayer meeting, they made a dash to the room in which Suhrawardy, with Pyarelal, Gandhi's Secretary, was sitting. Stones started falling on the

⁶ August 13.

⁷ A reckless hooligan.

⁸ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Vol. II, p. 368.

windows. Suhrawardy lay on the ground, quite impassive, muttering sarodonic remarks about the young men outside. "Deliver us Suhrawardy!" the crowd shouted. Gandhi got up, went to the window and threw it open, standing in full view of the crowd. He admonished them and then invited Suhrawardy to stand by him. "The two of us are one" in this task, he said. Someone called from the crowd: "Are you not responsible for the great Calcutta Killings?" "Yes, it was my responsibility," Suhrawardy said with manifest humility. It was a sort of confession, which the crowd never expected from the arrogant Suhrawardy. The crowd sobered down.

Meanwhile a miracle was at work. News came that a mixed procession of Hindus and Muslims, nearly five thousand of them, was parading the streets in the neighbourhood. In one street Hindus were trying to put up the National Flag for the Independence Day. A large number of Muslims asked if they could also come and help. Gandhi and Suhrawardy went out in the streets. When Gandhi returned that night at eleven, he said to his companion, who was known to be a patron of night life in Calcutta: "For you the day has just commenced. But half my night is gone. I get up at half past three."

The echoes of "Gandhi Ki Jai" continued to reverbrate in the streets throughout the night. Thousands of national flags flew next morning on Hindu and Muslim homes. Eager crowds went milling around the Hydari Manzil the whole day. Hundreds of Muslim women in their *burqas*⁹ came to pay their homage shouting: "Hindu, Muslim bhai bhai", "Jai Hind!". Vast crowds of Hindus and Muslims intermingled with each other, dancing, singing, merry-making together in public thoroughfares. Over a hundred thousand attended his prayer meetings on the 15th, 16th and 17th. The 18th was *Id*, the great Muslim festival. Half a million attended the prayer meeting and Gandhi offered *Id* greetings to the Muslims who reciprocated with hearty cheers.

Wrote Mountbatten to Gandhi: "In the Punjab we have 55,000 soldiers, and large-scale rioting on our hands. As a

* Veils.

serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the one-man Boundary Force, not forgetting his second in command, Mr Suhrawardy."

On the 30th the Boundary Force was put to its severest test. Gandhi had gone to bed. This was about 10 p.m. Some excited young men, who had heard of the alleged stabbing of a Hindu by a Muslim, surrounded Hydari Manzil. They started smashing the furniture and picture frames with hockey sticks. Panes began to crack all round. An old Muslim lady in the house and her son stood by Gandhi. Suhrawardy by then was not sharing the roof at night. As Gandhi got up to face the mad, excited, violent crowd, someone called out: "where is the rascal Suhrawardy?" Not finding him, they hurled their wrath on Gandhi. Gandhi took a lantern in his hands and stood in the door. A massive brickbat passed him by. There was a hail of stones injuring one or two people around him. A heavy stick narrowly missed his head. Gandhi asked himself, "Is this the result of the peace that was established on the 15th of August?" A violent communal conflagration broke out simultaneously in several parts of the city. Bombs, hand grenades, acid in soda bottles, knives, daggers, spikes, in short every kind of weapon was commissioned to strike terror among the Muslims. Thousands left their homes in panic. Gandhi decided to fast unto death or till peace was assured in Calcutta. "Can one fast against the goondas?" said Rajagopalachari, who was then Governor of Bengal. "If I falter now the conflagration might spread.... and this will end our short-lived dream of independence," replied Gandhi.

The fast commenced at 8.15 p.m. on the 1st of September. On the second and the third day, the mob fury continued in a rising crescendo. Gandhi lingered between life and death, the Ramdhun on his lips. He asked the leaders of all sections, who appealed to him to give up his fast, to act instead for the restoration of peace. "I will not mind if the entire police force is withdrawn," he said to them. "If in the result the whole of Calcutta swims in blood, it will not dismay me.... You and I shall then have to rush barefoot in the midst of the

flames and work without respite day and night till peace is restored or we will be all dead. That is my conception of a peace mission—not a mealy-mouthed, milk-and-water business." The fast continued, the frenzy mounted, the efforts to put out the conflagration multiplied. On the 4th of September, while Gandhi lay exhausted in a state of giddy restlessness, a document signed by accredited leaders of all sections was presented to him. It said: "We, the undersigned, promise to Gandhiji that, now that peace and quiet have been restored in Calcutta once again, we shall never allow communal strife in the city and shall strive unto death to prevent it." Seventy-three hours after it was commenced, Gandhi broke his fast. A truck-load of hand grenades and all sorts of weapons lay outside Hydari Manzil, surrendered voluntarily by the anti-social elements. Seeing these Gandhiji chuckled and said to Rajagopalachari, who was with him: "I am now thinking of leaving for the Punjab tomorrow." He did on the night of the seventh.

30

From Death to Immortality

I never believed that the soles of a man's feet could be so delicately shaped, so well scrubbed, smooth and so terribly clean. I had never looked at the soles of any person's feet for so long. Then there was the head! It had been recently shaved, one could almost see the bones, of the cranium, the veins under the soft transparent skin. I had never looked at any one's head for so long and so intensely. It was a grand, majestic, wonderfully formed head. The ears jutted out on both sides. They were conspicuously large. Gandhi lay in eternal repose. He was dead!

The story, which opened with Gandhi emerging as the dictator of a nonviolent struggle for Indian freedom after the end of the 1st World War, had come to an end. As I entered Birla House, soon after he had been fatally shot at,¹ the whole compound of the large palatial building, the roads and the lawns of neighbouring houses were all full of thousands of men and women, mostly in a state of shock, some sobbing, some still disbelieving that the Mahatma was dead. "Get the best doctors, don't let him die," they wailed. In the room to which his body had been hurriedly carried, an assorted crowd had assembled. Some of his chosen disciples were chanting his favourite hymns in sobs. Others stood mute or lay huddled, dazed, tears gushing out of their eyes. In front of a closed door, resting his head on his daughter's lap, lay Vallabhbhai Patel, his eyes bloodshot, his face livid, his body prostrate. For a

¹ Friday, the 30th of January, 1948.

long time, Nehru held back his tears. Then he had a spell of hiccups. Nehru rarely cried. When he did it was followed by hiccups, a spell of sobbing, a shaking of the ribs and then it would pass. Abul Kalam Azad stood mute, without his cap, his hands pressed on his walking stick in a pose of dramatic distress. He was shaking all over. Kripalani lay crumpled in a corner, sobbing silently with a few friends pressing his shoulders to calm his distress. With Rajen Babu, the stress had the effect of bringing up his asthma.

Devdas, Gandhi's son, and I had gone to Birla House together. It did surprise me that Devdas, who had the first claim to break down with emotion, retained a very dignified control over himself. After the first burst of silent tears, which we both shared, we walked up to Nehru and told him that while tears could wait, many things needed to be done at once, to prevent a threat to law and order in the city or in any part of the North. The mixed crowd outside had to be pacified and controlled. An official announcement had still to be made about the Mahatma.

Meanwhile, Vallabhbhai Patel slowly walked up to Nehru with Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister. They conferred together for a few minutes. Then Mountbatten steamed in. After a brief consultation with him, Nehru rushed out in the dark, climbed the pillar of a gate, to make the first announcement. He took a grave risk. Report had it that he was also one of the leaders the conspirators wanted to kill. Electric lights had been intermittently going off and on. After Nehru's speech, the crowd became even more restless. People began to mob the doors of the house, trying to have a last look of the great leader. We decided that the body should be carried to a well-lit open terrace on the first floor to enable the waiting, swelling crowd to have a last "darshan". I held the mattress from the feet. I could not keep my eyes off the scrubbed clean, almost polished soles, as we mounted step by step to the terrace. The body seemed almost weightless. As we laid the body down on the terrace we raised the head, so that the crowd could have a fuller view. We arranged the lights so that they fell on

the head and on the face. The face looked pale, but completely relaxed. It seemed as if the Mahatma was still asleep and may move and wake up any moment.

I stood behind the head. Maybe it was adoration, maybe it was superstition, but I was not the only one to feel that there was something more than the physical about that head which lent it even in death an aura of the spiritual, a sort of ethereal lustre that one visualised but could not see, a living, vibrant emptiness which did not invite tears but worship! To think that this handful of flesh, with the scars of three bullet wounds, till a few hours ago spoke the voice of God, and claimed to carry out a divine mandate! That his soft, deep, sonorous voice had in it the capacity to rouse and stir the hearts of millions, which could be more menacing than a thunderclap when in reprimand, and sweeter and more inspiring than a lullaby when it called for sacrifice. That this man who exercised more power over millions for quarter of a century than any other leader, living or dead, whose appeal was of the spirit and not of the sword, and whose weapon was suffering, not violence, had been assassinated at the hour of his greatest triumph, and also when he felt he had suffered his most dismal defeat.

"My life's work seems to be over," he had said after partition had been decided upon. "Today I find myself all alone!" How many times had he not asked his disciples to chant the soothing hymn of Tagore: "You shall walk alone Traveller...." How many times since partition had he not said to us: "I have no desire to live!" He had recently fasted "unto death" more than three times in penance for the crimes of others. He had willingly sought death if he could save India, her soul.

He who to us and millions had been a saint, and a superman, had lately become in the eyes of a certain section of Hindus a scourge, a demon, a man who in his zeal for imposing nonviolence was destroying the moral fibre of the community, was bartering away their rights and their possessions in the vain hope of appeasing Jinnah and the Muslim League in Pakistan. Even to some of his own intimate and

immediate political disciples he had become a "headache", or at best a nuisance. They would not say so. He continued to command their esteem, but he had ceased to enjoy their confidence! Nehru had looked upon him as his political father. But in matters of administration, political and economic policies, ideological concepts for India's future, he had now been drifting from him far and far away, till they were poles apart. Vallabhbhai Patel did not want a Hindu Raj. But he did want only those Muslims to stay in India whose loyalty to India was unreserved, unqualified and beyond doubt. With him the country came first. Religion next. Rajen Babu, Kripalani, Morarji Desai and others shared Patel's views and not the enthusiasm of Gandhi.

As I stood on the terrace, looking at the majestic head, while the crowd wailed in periodic sobs "*Gandhi Amar Hai*" (Gandhi is immortal), my mind went back to the day when, in response to the soul-stirring appeals of this frail man, I left my studies, burnt my boats and joined the struggle under his leadership. This was more than a quarter of a century ago. He had then promised "*Swaraj*" in a year. It took more than twenty-five years to reach the goal. This was not because his methods were defective but because he required a standard of moral perfection and rectitude beyond the capacity of the large-magnitude of his followers. This incapacity had created contradictions. As in the case of God, more heroic acts had been performed in his name than in the case of any other man known to history. Also more humbug and hypocrisy had been let loose on the people than in the name of any other saint or savant. Gandhi dead had become a beacon light showing the truth to generations seeking an alternative to human violence. He had also become a Messiah in whose name hypocrites, mountbanks and charlatans would parade as saints and receive homage from the gullible and the ignorant for years. He had become both a lodestar and a trademark: a grand, immortal incarnation of virtues and a silent witness to the grossest exploitation of his name and directives in different forms by doubtful disciples.

From this reverie I was suddenly awakened by the Defence Minister, Baldev Singh. Under the advice of Mountbatten he had taken over arrangements for the funeral the next day. As we went down the main hall, we were joined by Devdas, H. M. Patel, the Defence Secretary and a couple of other Secretaries, who had been deputed to help make all the arrangements. We drove to old Delhi and selected for the cremation the actual spot where Motilal Nehru and Malaviya had lit the first mammoth bonfire of foreign cloth before the adoption of the Resolution of Independence at the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929.

Next day, irony played a dirty trick! Gandhi was immobile, otherwise I felt he would have walked out of his own funeral with more than a million people watching. The last remains of the apostle of nonviolence were put on a "gun carriage" led by armoured cars and mounted machine guns. These were followed by the Viceregal bodyguard with lances blazing in the sun. Three thousand armed men drawn from the services closed up the ranks. Everything against which he had struggled lived, everything for which he seemed to have died, lay crumpled at his feet! There was such a rush on the gun carriage that hardly much room was left for the dead. Most of his old comrades who had sacrificed and struggled alongside him could only watch the grand funeral from a distance with tear-bedimmed eyes and a few sighs of sorrow.

"If India is ever partitioned," he had said, "my place will be in Pakistan." It was not a vain threat. Gandhi earnestly and sincerely wanted to move from Delhi to a place a few miles inside Pakistan, so that he "could serve Muslim refugees from India and Hindu refugees from Pakistan." He had written to Jinnah twice to be permitted to do so. There had been no answer. I went over to Lahore in the hope of meeting Jinnah, to arrange an invitation for Gandhiji, if possible.² Jinnah was expected there at the time. Jinnah, however, fell ill and his visit to Lahore was postponed. I conveyed Gandhi's wish to

² Gen. Shah Nivaz Khan of the INA was there on the same mission, with Mridula Sarabhai.

Liaquat who was also ill. He was really touched by the request and felt that after what Gandhi had achieved in Delhi, Bihar and Calcutta, his visit should be most welcome. He communicated this to Jinnah. After a few days, I was told that Jinnah was adamant. Jinnah was not willing to permit Gandhi to "enter even within an inch of Pakistani territory". "He would only stir trouble in Pakistan," he had said. "Let him take care of the Muslims in India," he wanted me to tell Gandhi, "and I will take care of the Hindus. Tell him what is happening in India is a shame!"

I saw how Jinnah was taking "care" of the Hindus in Pakistan. There were practically none of them left north of the Capital. The few who had been compelled to stay over in Lahore went about camouflaged as Muslims. They confined their movements only to "safe areas". Lahore, which had been one of the most cosmopolitan cities in India, had become "Islamicised" overnight. It was rich in Hindu temples and Sikh shrines. Muslim refugees were squatting in and around them and even using parts of them as latrines. The Mall, which prided in Italian and Swiss caterers, had a rash of kabab shops at every turning. The smell of sizzling, charcoal-broiled meat spread for miles, becoming more and more intense as one entered the old city.

Muslim refugees, in search of urban rehabilitation, found that most of the valuable properties left by Hindus and Sikhs had already been usurped by local residents, generally by gangsters and anti-social elements who had erstwhile paraded as National Guards. They now treated every Muslim refugee as a potential enemy. They dictated obedience at the point of guns and pistols. I never saw so many individuals roaming about in the streets with rifles, guns and daggers as on the roads of Lahore.

It was also amusing how the nov-rich enjoyed their newly achieved prosperity. One of these toughs had looted a shop in the Cantonment which catered to the sanitary and culinary needs of soldiers. On the occasion of his son's marriage, I was told, he made a big display of his riches. In the process he pro-

vided for his two hundred guests new enamel dishes and clean white-and-blue service pots. A piece of furniture that was being sold cheap by these *nov-riche* was spring beds without mattresses. They found the mattresses useful for sprawling on the floor. Lying on the springs seemed a torture. I met several influential Muslims who had migrated from Delhi and who strangely enough were staying at the Falettis Hotel "for safety". A stage had now been reached when Muslims were threatening or killing muslims in the name of religion for purposes of acquiring rich properties.

Muslims are divided into several sects. The Sunnis were in a majority in West Pakistan. Paradoxically enough, Jinnah was a Shia Muslim and a first generation convert, both unpopular factors in West Pakistan. The Agha Khanis were a sect of Borah Muslims who believed that the first Agha Khan was a direct descendent of Mohammed. This was a heresy which the Sunnis did not tolerate. The Pakistan Government did not accept Agha Khan's ancestry but welcomed his princely contributions. The Qadianis were another sect which considered the head of the sect, a former school-master, as the living symbol of the dead Prophet. One of the most notable personalities in Pakistan, Sir Zaffrullah, who became the Foreign Minister and one of Pakistan's best advocates at the United Nations, was a Qadiani. At the time I was in Lahore, Sir Zaffrullah had not been given any office and was moving between India, London and Pakistan to find a job and "safety".

A neighbour of mine in New Delhi was a famous doctor. He was an intimate friend of Zaffrullah and was himself an ardent Qadiani. Like Zaffrullah, he disported the regulation beard and whiskers. He said his Namaz solemnly four times a day, observed the *roza*,³ never touched meat unless sanctified by a butcher's prayer, nor alcohol which had not been diluted by water "purified by the *Kalma*". He swore by the Muslim League. It was sometime in 1946 that the police swooped on the doctor's house and his clinic in Old Delhi, and made a haul of hand grenades, spears, daggers and a few guns and revol-

³ Fast.

vers. I then learnt that my neighbour had been collecting an arsenal for anti-social elements.

The doctor, however, absconded. I unexpectedly met my doctor friend in Lahore. He greeted me with utmost cordiality and invited me to dine with him the next day. When I went to the address he had given, the house was empty. Several pieces of broken furniture were lying outside. I got genuinely scared lest it had been a trap. As I returned to my residence, which happened to be the house of the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, I found my doctor friend waiting for me. He had brought a sumptuous dinner with him. While dining he disclosed that there had been a raid on his house, inspired by a mullah who was preaching against Qadianis, and calling them "worse than kaffirs.⁴ Actually, some of the neighbours had an eye on the fabulous bungalow he had acquired very cheaply by negotiating with its Hindu owner who had migrated to India. Because of their influence, the Qadianis had been more successful in such deals than others. He had brought the food from a hotel, but wanted asylum for the night till he could fly the next day to Karachi where such bigotry was not being preached or practised.

On the Frontier, tensions of a different character had developed. The Pathans were proud of their pure Islamic ancestry. The Muslims from India and West Punjab were mostly converts from lower strata of society. Socially the Pathans looked down upon the convert Muslims. Politically they were afraid of their domination. Financially they did not trust them. Hence they wanted a separate, independent State, "Pakhtoonistan".

Removed by a distance of 1,500 miles, East Pakistan posed problems of a still different type. It was more populated, larger and richer than West Pakistan. The Muslims, Bengali converts from the lower classes, spoke Bengali, observed Bengali customs, and dressed and lived completely different from the Western Muslims. They wanted to evict the rich Hindus because they had an eye on their property, but they wanted

⁴ Infidels.

the Hindu peasantry to stay as they were necessary to their economy. They preferred free migration, as many who had homes in East Pakistan had jobs in the jute mills of West Bengal.

Having got his Pakistan, Jinnah soon realized that his two-nation theory in the words of Chaudhury Khaliquzzaman had "proved positively injurious to the Musalmans of India and on a long-range basis for Musalmans everywhere."⁵ Jinnah was too proud to publicly admit his blunder. He was also too sensitive not to react to the suffering his blunder had caused and was causing to millions on both sides of the border. Whatever his detractors might say, neither he nor Liaquat ever dreamt that Muslims in Pakistan left to themselves would behave like brutes, dacoits, goondas and cannibals against Hindus and Sikhs and later even against their own co-religionists!

Jinnah later arrived in Lahore, hoping to neutralise some of the despair of millions of homeless, destitute Muslim refugees by making a bid for Kashmir. Tribal hoards were let loose on Kashmir, supported by Pakistani forces. He found India effectively and powerfully entrenched in Kashmir. He felt cheated and defeated. He was in Rawalpindi when his health again broke down. He returned to Karachi a weary, disappointed, broken man. His lungs were seriously affected.

Jamshed Nusserwanji, an old Congress veteran, was as great a friend of Gandhi as he was of Jinnah. Being a Parsi, he felt safe in Karachi. A few days after Gandhi's assassination, Jamshed Nusserwanji went to Government House. He found Jinnah dozing on a garden seat, something his pride would never have permitted. For the first time Jinnah felt humbled, and characteristically confessed: "I am so tired, Jamshed, so tired!"⁶ A few days later, Ian Stephens of *The Statesman* asked him if he was ill. "No, I am not ill at all," he said in soft tones. "I get tired."

Jinnah became weaker and weaker, thinner and thinner and

⁵ Chaudhury Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, p. 400

⁶ Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah*, p. 210.

more and more "tired". He retired to Ziarat, a hill station near Quetta, where the weather was cold. His ADC was sent in quest of some woollen vests. He searched the whole of Quetta but failed to match Jinnah's bony size. Finally, he brought a few meant for women.⁷ Jinnah was still more than feminine in his love for attractive clothes. When the doctor told him that in his silk pyjamas he might catch a cold, he pleaded, "But I have always worn only pyjamas made of silk, I haven't any others." With reluctance he accepted the woollen ones ordered for him. While he was still ill and there was talk of his being taken to Karachi, his vanity asserted itself. "Don't take me there on crutches," he said to his doctor. "I want to go when I can walk... I would dislike being carried on a stretcher from the car to my room."

Disappointments were crowding round him. The Kashmir adventure had dismally failed. There was trouble in the North-West Frontier. East Pakistan was rebellious. Khaliquzzaman, Shaheed Suhrawardy and other Muslim leaders who had returned from India reported that the Muslims felt insecure in India because of the blood-curdling stories of Muslim atrocities in Pakistan which reached the other side. He now felt deeply his obstinate refusal to allow Gandhi to meet him or to enter Pakistan. But now Gandhi was dead. Where and how could they meet? He told his doctor, "You know, when I first came to Ziarat, I wanted to live. Now, however, it does not matter whether I live or die."⁸

Jinnah developed pneumonia. On the 11th of September he was secretly flown to Karachi. The plane arrived unannounced. It was met by a solitary ambulance without flag or escort. Contrary to his last wish Jinnah had to be placed on a stretcher

⁷ These fitted Jinnah. He squirmed, but did not protest. After the first wash there were holes in them. The shopkeeper could not change them because there were no more in stock. He however got them darned. The "banya" Jinnah sent the ADC back to ask the shopkeeper, in the circumstances, to give a discount. The shopkeeper was a Baluchi Muslim. He generously returned five rupees. "Good boy," said Jinnah, "You must learn the value of money."

⁸ Jinnah died on the 11th of September, 1948.

and secretly taken into the ambulance. As ill-luck would have it, while passing the densest and dirtiest section of the refugee settlement, the ambulance broke down. The wait lasted more than an hour. Flies swarmed around the patient. The humid air was full of foul odours. For once Jinnah, though restless, felt patient and humble. When the nurse fanned off the swarming flies by an improvised fan made out of a discarded cardboard, he pressed his frail hand on her knee in gratitude. No one among the refugees realised that the man inside the damaged flagless ambulance was Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah. After repairs, the ambulance reached Government House. The doctors pronounced the patient dead.

Jinnah was a great man among small people. Gandhi was a greater man among the greatest of his time. He was among the great of all time. Gandhi symbolised the spirit of truth, non-violence, love and unity. Jinnah symbolised the violence of bigotry, division, disunity and hate. Gandhi believed that only the right means could lead to right ends. Jinnah did not bother about means. For him the ends were all-important. Gandhi was courage, truth and honesty personified. He stooped to conquer. Jinnah also was a man of unusual courage and rare integrity. He was in this head and shoulders above all others in Pakistan. But, measured against Gandhi, he was like a dwarf prowling about the feet of a giant. He made up by conceit and bluff what he lacked in graciousness. Gandhi was the last word in simplicity. Jinnah looked like a Saville Row tailor's model. Gandhi was physically a question mark. They were born five years apart. They died within eight months of each other.

They Wanted to be Kings

Lt-General Maharaj Adhiraja Aljah, Hisam-ul-Sultanant, Manzur-i-Zaman, Mukhtar-ul-Malik,¹ Sir George Jiwaji Rao Scindia Bahadur, K.C.S.I., Maharaja of Gwalior, thirty-six, five feet four, stood against the window of his private study, in his hundred-room palace, telephone in hand, blue in the face, his clothes drenched in a cold sweat: numb!

A few minutes earlier he had been telling two pretty American visitors in the main drawing room that the Durbar Hall had the largest one-piece carpet in the world, the chandeliers hanging from the roof were larger and more in number than those in Buckingham Place, that the silver train which was commissioned for serving food at banquets in the dining hall was the only one of its kind, and that provision existed on the ground floor to feed 2,000 guests at one sitting.

He was on the point of showing them some of the family jewels, a tiara of matched pearls unique in the world, and rare antiques and trophies collected by the Scindias, when an ADC rushed in, unduly excited, and whispered something which turned the ruler completely pale. His Highness rushed to the telephone in his private study, and after a first hoarse "hello!" put it down as if he had been stung by a viper.

"I think it is a fake," he whispered to a Secretary and me, shaking all over. "In any case, be discreet, and find out what it is all about, till I come back." With these words, His Highness put down the receiver and rushed to a side room to change

¹ All titles, traditional and otherwise.

into fresh clothes. The two American visitors, meanwhile, were sent off for an elephant ride. "Can I speak to His Highness," said the authoritarian, irritated voice on the other side. "This is Louis Mountbatten." The private secretary informed the voice that His Highness was in the dressing room, and that he could give him any message His Excellency may have to convey. "But I was just speaking to him," the voice said. "Tell His Highness to come to Delhi at once. I will be waiting." The Secretary explained that it was already getting late into the evening and that, after finding out His Highness's wishes, he would telephone to His Excellency's Secretary as to when it would be convenient for him to drive down to Delhi the next day. "He does not have to drive down," said the Viceroy, adding, "I want him to fly out, and now. Tell His Highness that I have already sent an Army plane to bring him here. It must be waiting for His Highness at his airport this very minute." So it was. "But Your Excellency," said the Secretary almost plaintively, "His Highness has some guests coming to dinner and some important engagements tomorrow." His Highness had come back and was listening to the conversation from another line. He thoroughly approved of this bringing in of "guests", since it was a fact that the two American strangers were coming for dinner and His Highness very much looked forward to the pleasure of their company. He was again in a cold sweat when Mountbatten replied: "My dear man, will you tell His Highness this is important business. It cannot wait. The guests can. Ask him to leave at once."

Those were critical days, not only for the country, but also for the princes. The Maharaja of Gwalior was among the top five. Other premier States being Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore and Baroda. Changes in my own professional life at this time had brought me closer to His Highness and some of the other princes. This explains my presence at Gwalior.

Finding themselves constitutionally independent, Indian princes started toying with a variety of plans to avoid, or at least to postpone, for as long as possible, territorial fusion with India. Although most of the States had signed a treaty of

Accession, they did not wish to go any further. They were now in full control of their armies, which had been hitherto engaged in World War II. Some of the armies matched the standards of training and efficiency of the Indian Army. This encouraged them to toy with possibilities of carving out big units out of small States, or, in the case of big States, of preserving as much of their independence as possible.

Hyderabad, the largest among Indian States, was the first to set up the banner of rebellion. The Nizam, one of the most astute among the Indian princes, and by far the richest and most thrifty, was a Muslim. All important and key posts in the civil and military wings of his administration were held by trusted Muslims, mostly recruited from loyal feudal families. During the period of political transition he and his feudal associates had secretly mobilised bands of unruly, anti-social gangsters operating in the name of Islam to coerce, terrorise and where possible loot the Hindus. The Razakars had become a non-official religious militia to fight for and preserve the Muslim control of the State and the independence of the Nizam. Their leader, Qasim Rizvi, a former school teacher, believed that once Hyderabad became independent the Muslim minority could by compulsion, conversion, forced marriages and monetary temptations decrease the Hindu population in due course, become a majority, and preserve Hyderabad as a sovereign Muslim State. A thin, lean, medium-sized, middle-aged man with a shapely beard, deep furtive cunning eyes and a loud, squeaky voice, Rizvi was just the man the Nizam needed to mobilise a religious militia and to rouse a sense of ambition among other Muslim rulers to raise the banner of Islam and to make a joint bid to found a princely confederate State, a neo-revival of the Moghul Empire.

The Nizam started riding several horses one and the same time. While he was evading accession, he was using Sir William Monckton, his legal adviser, a close friend of Mountbatten, to negotiate the possibility of a treaty with India. If this became possible, he could then have a separate treaty with England. Through Laik Ali, his new Prime Minister, and other

Muslims, he maintained close touch with Jinnah, in case treaty overtures to India failed, and a straight alliance with Pakistan became necessary. Towards this end, he had paid twenty crores to Pakistan, and in return had received heavy consignments of arms for his army. In addition, a very large quantity had been left by helpful British officers in charge of an ordnance factory in Hyderabad, manufacturing machine guns, etc. The Nizam was also secretly negotiating with the Portuguese to gain direct access to the sea through Goa, in case a showdown with India became inevitable. The Portuguese were only too glad to become a link between Hyderabad and Pakistan. While the Nizam kept his plans secret, Kazim Rizvi was fairly outspoken about these possibilities. During one of his visits to Delhi he declared that his Razakars were going to be "the liberators of the Muslims of India," and that with the help of Hyderabad they would spearhead an insurgent movement to restore Muslim domination of the country. While the Nizam took no responsibility for the inflammatory speeches of Rizvi and the lawless activities of the Razakars, he took no steps either to curb the one or the other. He allowed the Rizvi horse to run without riding it.

In the North, Hari Singh, the Maharaja of Kashmir, had been trying to negotiate separately with India and Pakistan to consolidate Kashmir's independence by a treaty with both, failing which to sell out to the highest bidder. But before any negotiations could yield constructive results, dark terror was let loose on Kashmir by tribal Pathan marauders from Pakistan's Northern frontier, aided and abetted by Jinnah and the Pakistan Government, leaving Hari Singh no choice.

The Maharaja of Baroda, Major-General Farzand-i-Khas-Daulat-e-Englishia, Sir Partap Singh, shared Maharaja Hari Singh's ambitions, as also his callow, indecisive mind. The day the States were declared independent he decided, like the Nizam and Hari Singh, to be a king in his own right, the sovereign ruler of a dominion as large as France², extending from Surat in the South East to Dwarka on the western coast.

² Special son of the King of England.

Partap Singh succeeded Siyaji Rao, one of the most enlightened and distinguished rulers of any Indian State, in 1939. He was then forty, married, and had four children. During the forty years he ripened in everything except the disciplines of morality and the laws of economics.

Partap Singh, during his adventures on the race course, came under the spell of Sita Devi, a well-built, sharp-featured, shapely, dark, highly assertive wife of a landlord from South India. Her husband, even though he was rich enough to meet her expensive tastes, was a lean, leisure-loving, philosophic-minded, stay-at-home type, who could not keep pace with her passion for social excitement. While love blossomed, because both the lovers were married, marriage seemed impossible. Partap Singh could not take a second wife because his father had banned polygamy in the State. Sita Devi, being a Hindu wife, could not divorce her husband. Sita Devi found a way. She embraced Islam. A Muslim girl cannot be a Muslim if married to a Hindu. Thus she became unmarried. Partap Singh by a special decree amended the ban on polygamy to the extent that it should not be applicable to the ruler and that too retrospectively. Sita Devi turned a Hindu after divorce. What seemed impossible thus became a reality. Sita Devi became the legal second wife of Partap Singh. Unfortunately, no one watching their later life could say that "they lived happily ever after," nor was the marriage recognised by the Government as legal. Sita Devi's status remained a question mark.

During one of his many visits to Partap Singh, I accompanied V. P. Menon, then Secretary of the newly created States Ministry. "He is putting on airs and is giving us a lot of trouble," Menon told me. "I will have to pull his ears." We were received in an outside room of the Baroda Palace, one of the grandest buildings in Bombay, overlooking the sea. We were kept waiting with a lavish supply of cigars and cigarettes. After a long wait the ADC came to ask V.P. why the Minister, whoever he was, did not call on His Highness himself. This irritated V.P. He told the Secretary that he was seeing

His Highness by "appointment" and with the consent and authority not only of the Minister, but also of the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten.

When V.P. returned after the interview, he could hardly contain himself. It was his ears that had been pulled. "How did the interview go," I asked. "He sat there with a map of western India on the wall. He gave me a long lecture on the strategic position of Baroda, the strength of the Baroda army, the advantage for the Union of India to have Baroda as a friend and an ally, willing to help guard the frontiers of western India, rather than to compel Baroda to make common cause with hostile States, or hostile 'neighbours'. He condescended to talk to me because he was told I enjoyed Sardar Patel's confidence. He would of course have preferred to talk to the Sardar directly." And then, said Menon, "after puffing at his cigar repeatedly and vigorously, the Maharaja said, 'You are having trouble in Kashmir. You are having trouble in Hyderabad. Some of the Rajputana rulers like Jodhpur and Jaisalmer are out to betray you. You can no longer trust Bhopal or any Muslim ruler. Junagadh is selling out to Pakistan. I am alone your best friend who can control western India and hold it for you. My army is there to offer help. If you do not accept my terms, well, you see these red marks on the map. Here are located my troops. On a given signal they can clear you out of western India in a few weeks'."

On September 2, 1947, he sent his terms in a letter written in his own hands directly to Patel.

"Baroda will be ready to shoulder the responsibility," the letter said, "of maintaining law and order as well as peace and tranquillity of the whole of Kathiawar and Gujarat, on the following conditions: (1) transfer to Baroda the control of all western Indian States and certain adjoining districts; (2) offer armed support to Baroda in any emergency; (3) recognize Partap Singh as the king of Gujarat and Kathiawar."

While these negotiations were going on, rare and costly jewels of the Baroda Jawahar Khana were being transferred to safes in Europe and America. The seven-strand necklace of

matched black pearls, three famous diamonds, "The Star of the South", "Eugene", and "Sha-e-Akbar", two rare carpets inlaid with pearls, necklaces of rubies and rare emeralds, and a lot of gold had gone. Besides, within a few months Baroda transferred abroad or withdrew from the State treasuries more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ crores of rupees. He raised his privy purse from thirty to fifty lakhs a year. Baroda displayed all the weaknesses his father did not possess. Baroda used a part of these funds to buy political support for himself in Britain, from influential Congress circles in India, and from friendly Indian States. While Sardar Patel and the States Ministry were engaged in bringing Partap Singh to earth, some of the Congress Ministers at the Centre and in the provinces, some important politicians of western India, quite a few lawyers with a Congress background were lining their pockets working for Baroda. "These", V. P. Menon said, "made fantastic promises and gave him false hopes with regard to his future position and status."³

There were more than two hundred States in Kathiawar, through which the Baroda territory stretched out to the sea.⁴ Many of these States had their own railway lines, extending from two miles to a hundred miles, with the track of one State breaking into the other, creating the most amazing medley of jurisdiction known anywhere in the world. A delay of eight to ten hours in negotiating the three hundred miles from Viramgam, the railway Customs barrier, and the ports like Okha, Bhavnagar; Porbander or Jamnagar was not unusual. A ruler delayed in a week-end tiger hunt, a prince detained by his favourite concubine after a late dinner, a marriage party in a ruling family awaiting an auspicious hour, a British officer of the Residency returning late from a fishing expedi-

³ V. P. Menon, *Transfer of Power*, p. 410.

⁴ Quite a few of these were maritime States, having good harbours such as Verawall, Kutch, Jamnagar, Porbander, Bhavnagar, etc. The fourteen Salute States were fairly large. Of the two hundred odd States, forty-six had an area of two square miles and less, and eight nearly half a square mile each. In the total area of 22,000 sq. miles were as many as eight hundred and fifty different administrative jurisdictions, the territories of one State running into the other, creating legal and administrative confusion.

tion could all keep a whole train waiting for hours. While most of the States were tiny bits of territory, the rulers were disproportionately rich. Most of them depended less on the yield of the soil and more on the spoils of the sea. Smuggling was an accepted trade in most States, and it was not unusual for rulers or their wives to take the lion's share. Gold, pearls from the Persian Gulf, manufactured merchandise from Europe, cigarettes and liquor were all freely smuggled. This enabled most rulers to have a large income and to keep taxes low. Except the farmer who had to depend on the vagaries of the monsoon, the common traders were reasonably prosperous.

The Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, among a few others, was a realistic, far-seeing statesman. He realized that the two hundred-odd States could not separately exist and remain individually sovereign. Jinnah wanted them to join Pakistan and assured them that they would be allowed the fullest internal autonomy. In the alternative, Bhopal suggested that they could form a dominion of their own. Baroda wanted to be king of western India, with these rulers as his chieftains. The Jam Sahib however advised them to reject all these offers and to make terms with the Congress Government as early as possible, salvage as much of the booty collected by them from the time of their forefathers, and get out with a reasonable privy purse. Any other plan would be suicidal. If they did not come to terms, the popular movement might soon sweep them away like brushwood and they might lose everything, including, maybe, their heads. They reluctantly agreed.

One of the major maritime States of Kathiawar had a Muslim ruler, but a predominantly Hindu population.

Nawab Sir Mahabat Khan Rasulkhanji was both sly and eccentric. He spent most of the time in his harem among wives and women of all gradations of relationship. He was fond of watching cock fights and partrige bouts, or a sort of "Ludo" (*chaupat*) where girls, sometimes nude, or partly draped, served as living pawns. There was nothing extraordinary about these sports. These had been a common pastime of many princes. He also specialised in propagating the best breeds of

dogs under his personal care and supervision. He gave his dogs a personality. Junagadh was one place where dog marriages were performed with as much ritual and ceremony as the weddings of junior princes. State bands headed the marriage processions. The dog "groom" travelled in state, sometimes on an elephant, bedecked in a brocade jacket and garlands to meet the "bride". The owner of the "bride" offered the wedding feast to the guests and presents to the "bridegroom". The ceremony sometimes lasted three to four days. The Nawab left the administration mostly in the hands of his Chief Minister. His Chief Minister in 1947 was a capable but weak administrator, Abdul Kadir Mohammed Hussain. The Nawab and the Chief Minister found themselves in disagreement over whether Junagadh should declare its independence, accede to India or join Pakistan. Jinnah was willing to offer a blank cheque to any ruler who expressed willingness to accede to Pakistan, because he knew that when the time came the sword arm of Pakistan could fill in the blanks. The Chief Minister felt that, the population of Junagadh being predominantly Hindu, Pakistan being more than three hundred miles by sea from Verawal, any attempt to link the destinies of Junagadh with Pakistan would be suicidal. Abdul Kadir was advised to go on leave abroad "for reasons of health". Sir Shah-Niwaz Bhutto was imported from Karachi to finalise Junagadh's accession to Pakistan.

After declaring Junagadh's accession to Pakistan,⁵ Sir Shah-Niwaz bundled off the Nawab, his wives, concubines and dogs to Pakistan, with as much of the wealth in the treasury as could be exported. In his name he took sole charge of the administration. Jinnah was jubilant since the Nawab had brought a lot of money which could be invested in Pakistani securities, but also a valuable territory which could spearhead a wider insurgency on the part of some of the coastal Indian States.

Jodhpur was one of the premier States of Rajputana, with its north-western boundary contiguous with Pakistan. Jaisalmer

⁵ On the 15th of August, 1947.

and Bikaner were two other States with Hindu rulers and predominantly Hindu populations but with boundaries adjoining Pakistan. Bhopal had done a lot to inject them with the virus of sovereignty. Jinnah started to woo them to join Pakistan. Bikaner soon walked out of the trap. But the young ruler of Jodhpur kept wavering for a long time. Rajput States were generally backward, socially, educationally and economically. Jodhpur and Jaisalmer were even more backward than the rest. Jaisalmer was known for its camels, sand dunes, graves, derelict forts and palaces. Jodhpur was much larger in territory, but, beyond the capital city, the territory was mainly sand dunes, derelict forts and the mud homes of villagers.

Young Hanwant, the then ruler of Jodhpur, had not been long in the *gaddi*. His father, a robust, medium-sized glutton, had died recently at an early age. Hanwant Singh's father had, however, lived thrifly and had left him a fairly prosperous State, and a palace the like of which did not exist anywhere west of Udaipur. Hanwant Singh was not so much interested in the fifty-roomed, marble-studded palace as in its unusually spacious basement. Here he had installed a workshop-cum-laboratory to carry on experiments in chemistry, physics, etc. of a rather elementary character. During these experiments the basement had been torn up twice with explosion, and Hanwant Singh had suffered both major and minor injuries. As an outdoor sport he loved flying and hunting.⁶ During the short time he had been ruler, however, he had done little to improve the lot of his people. Like the people of most other parts of Rajputana I found them ignorant, caste-ridden, mentally and physically isolated from the world of progress, and generally ground down under the tyranny of a very backward type of feudalism.

Even more backward than the Rajput States were the Jat States, fringing Rajputana, but without any boundary link

⁶ I had met him several times before he succeeded to the *gaddi* and had found him unusually alert and receptive. He was a keen student of politics, and quite well informed on international affairs. But he had a demoniacal temper.

with Pakistan: Bharatpur, Alwar, Dholpur. Except where the palaces of rulers were concerned, people still lived in conditions which prevailed during the days of the Moghuls. All three had substantial Muslim populations. These were mostly labourers, depressed classes, petty farmers, who observed Hindu customs and rituals while avowing the Muslim faith. The last ruler of Dholpur was an orthodox Hindu, a royalist by faith and a firm believer in the "divine right of kings". He, like his predecessors to the third degree, died issueless. In the neighbouring State of Alwar, ever since the State came into existence in the early part of the nineteenth century with the fall of the Mahratta empire, no ruler had a direct successor. Sir Jey Singh, the predecessor of the ruler at the time, was ordered out of the State in 1937. Sir Jey Singh was a brilliant eccentric who combined the qualities of a genius with the weaknesses of a rake. His successor did not share his brilliance, but tried to imitate his eccentricities. At the time of independence, he had as chief Minister Dr N. B. Khare, a former member of the Viceroy's Council.

Like many others at the time, the young ruler wanted to make Alwar an independent sovereign territory. In Khare he found a powerful ally. Khare made Alwar the training ground for a large contingent of the RSS⁷ underground, so that they could clear the Muslims out of Alwar and serve like the Razakars of Hyderabad, the nucleus of a movement for setting up sovereign Hindu States. Reports reached New Delhi that the Muslims were being killed and terrorised out of the State.

The third State, Bharatpur, was also suspected of a conspiracy to set up a Hindu Raj by the extermination or forcible eviction of Muslims. Bharatpur was founded by a Jat free-booter by the name of Brij, born of a Rajput father and a Jat mother. Bharatpur had produced some excellent fighters. The Bharatpur Fort, constructed in the eighteenth century, was one of the most well-designed defensive structures hitherto built in any part of the world. In 1805, the forces of General Lake failed to penetrate its defences and it was after many

⁷ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

years that the State was brought under control, more by strategy than by force. The ruler, Maharaja Brajendra Singh, succeeded to the *gaddi* in 1929. His father, after a long period of turmoil and struggle, had been ordered to abdicate.

Maharaja Brajendra Singh, a lean, medium-sized, amiable ruler, spent as much time in the pursuit of pleasure as he did in devotional worship. He underwent many kinds of penances every day, at the same time engaging in the good things life could offer. His younger brother was aggressive, ambitious and impetuous. He found in this transitional period of political change a good opportunity of building Bharatpur into a strong Hindu State. Whether the ruler and his brother had any direct hand in some brutal attacks against Muslims, the looting of their property, the looting of trains passing Bharatpur, the building-up of a powerful RSS cell in the State, one cannot say, but some of these constituted serious allegations against them. Mountbatten, Patel and Nehru had evidence that they were responsible for some ghastly acts, or had connived at their perpetration.

At this very time wild rumours had been afloat that some major chieftains had been parties to Gandhi's assassination. There was evidence to the effect that the alleged assassins, Apte and Godse, had visited several Indian States including Gwalior before the murder. Because of the alleged activities of the Maharaja of Alwar and Dr Khare, they had been summoned to New Delhi. Report had also reached that the Maharaja of Bharatpur, a fast personal friend of Gwalior, and his brother had also been summoned to Delhi.

It was in this background of startling events, that young Jiwaji Rao of Gwalior suddenly received the imperative telephonic summons from Mountbatten to leave for New Delhi at once. A few of his intimates, fearing the worst, advised the ruler to "fall ill" and thereby delay his departure. "Falling ill" was a common device with rulers to avoid a crisis. The chief of the medical services was called to arrange for a "convincing" illness. I advised him however to face the situation boldly, as feigned illness would only emphasise suspicion if such existed.

His wife was the only one to support me. Jiwaji Rao with tears in his eyes took leave of everybody. We were further shocked when we saw the waiting craft. It was an open Army plane which had only one hard wooden seat besides the pilot. This was certainly not worthy of ruler who had two luxury planes of his own. This further added to His Highness's anxiety. He insisted I accompany him, along with one of his confidential secretaries. It was one of the most awkward uncomfortable flights I have made in my life. Sitting in the solo seat, His Highness held our hands, while we without even seat belts, employed our spare hands to seek some kind of stability on the flat wooden framework on which we were squatting. The breeze was fierce and dust-laden. At the airport we were met by the Viceregal car, an escort car and a lot of police. This made the Maharaja even more nervous. We were then whisked off to the Viceroy's House. In an ante-room an ADC kept us waiting. The Viceroy was having some guests. This almost convinced Jiwaji Rao that he was under some kind of cloud. A little later, V. P. Menon arrived and took Jiwaji Rao to Mountbatten. "Don't leave the place till I return," were the parting words of the Maharaja to us.

Actually, someone's stupidity had created a storm in a tea cup. It was suggested to Mountbatten that before taking action against Alwar or Bharatpur, it might be desirable to consult a few of the leading princes, such as Jam Saheb, the Maharaja of Patiala and the Maharaja of Gwalior. All this fuss could have been avoided if the Maharaja had been allowed to reach even the next day, or to come by car, and if the Viceroy or his aides had disclosed to the Maharaja the purpose of the urgent invitation.⁸

⁸That night we sat up till well past midnight going through the Bharatpur case and finally drafting a statement which made it possible for the Maharaja to return to his State, a chastened and penitent man, and his brother to go abroad on an expensive holiday. Alwar was removed from the *gaddi*.

The “Dhoti” Dynasty

1948. It was a hot sultry evening in late June. Chandni Chowk, the “silver street” of Delhi, wore a festive appearance. From the Red Fort to the municipal gardens¹ colourfully decorated arches had been erected. The whole street had been festooned with bunting, flags, ornate hangings and floral wreaths.

Chandni Chowk had changed considerably since the days when a canal with fountains divided it. It had changed even since 1946. The shops, the projecting balconies, the wide pavements were all there. But on its pavements in front of the shops, even in the main road, and in the side lanes, thousands of distressed refugees from the Punjab, the North-West Frontier and Sind swarmed with their big and small wares to make an honest living. Nearly two years had elapsed since they had been driven out from their hearths and homes, sometimes only with no more than the clothes they were wearing. After crossing the border, when they felt they had finally reached the homeland, they were callously dumped in their hundreds and thousands in improvised camps. Outside these pens of human misery they were mostly unwelcome.

Despite prejudice, despite handicaps, despite man-made difficulties, these god-forsaken victims of political wrath and communal persecution had slowly but surely persevered in developing little colonies for themselves, setting up homes for their children and starting petty trades along the roadside to

¹ Now known as Gandhi Grounds.

earn their livelihood. They trudged everyday to Delhi from distant habitats in scorching heat, pelting rain or freezing temperatures, to set up their small wares rescued from Pakistan, or purchased locally, to earn whatever was possible for themselves and their children. For hours they sat on bare pavements, using torn tarpaulins, tattered blankets or empty packing cases to protect themselves against sun and rain. When men got tired, women took over. Even little children helped. All over Delhi refugee children took to selling newspapers, looking after parked cars, scooters and bicycles, cleaning shoes and doing odd-jobs for shoppers. These children of distress adopted every means to earn a livelihood, but they did not beg. Within a few years, many of these pavement adventurers had become proud owners of prosperous stores, large eating-houses, factories, modern farms and other profitable enterprises. Their days of misery were even forgotten with time. But one thing they could neither forgive nor forget: the latent hostility of those who should have received them with open arms and should have adequately compensated them for the political blunders of the leaders and their wrong assessment of the situation.

For them June 22 was no different from other days. But for once, even they had removed their wares from the pavements. They had draped their broken packing boxes with colourful bedspreads. They had hung expensive shawls and carpets from the lamp posts. They proudly flew the national flag. More than half a million people had collected in the Gandhi Park for a reception arranged to bid farewell to Lord and Lady Mountbatten.² It was for them that Chandni Chowk was wearing a gala appearance. As the procession entered Chandni Chowk, the cheers of thousands rent the sky. Never had a foreigner received a more popular send-off in any country, any time in history. Some said they saw Mountbatten's eyes moisten with a sense of gratitude, and his voice seemingly hoarse with

² Lord Mountbatten had been, since the 15th of August, Governor-General of free India, the first to hold this office since Independence. He was the last Viceroy.

emotion. If this was true, it was the first time that Mountbatten, ever since he took charge of "Operation-Scuttle", surrendered to the call of sentiment.

Even though more than twenty years have elapsed since the Mountbattens left India, it is not easy for those who witnessed them operating in their different spheres, all three of them, Louis, Edwina and Pamela, to assess the impact they made on current events, and how far and in what manner they altered or influenced the course of history.

Mountbatten did a great administrative job with the skill and efficiency of an admiral. But it was in the sphere of public relations that all three of them excelled. Almost everyone from Gandhiji downwards began to lean on Mountbatten with a sense of personal confidence and sought his advice and help even in matters which ordinarily would not have suffered intrusion from a foreigner, whether he was a commoner or of royal blood. Pamela, the Mountbattens' daughter, tall, slender, large-eyed with the look of demure innocence on an oval, attractive face, was just the type to attract paternal patronage from the elders, emotional response from the young or not very young, and a school-mistress attitude from Congress women of all ages who then hovered around the seats of political power. Pamela's presence at prayer meetings offered Gandhiji the satisfaction of a prestige addition to his audience. She animated the scene.

Edwina, Lady Mountbatten, was different. She was still attractive to the post-middle age group, but it was her alert mind, her emotional personality, her dynamic nature, her humanitarian outlook which added a certain intellectual magnetism to her personality that few elders could resist. Gandhiji had great regard for her. He admired most of all her tireless humanitarian work among the refugees, which exposed her to dust, disease and filth. She had Nehru's confidence, in a manner that could be only possible between two people of ripe age, ripe intellect and "ripe experience". It was a real "companionship". Nehru was no hypocrite. He liked the company of intelligent women, and time permitting displayed

a certain amount of amorousness, platonic or otherwise, pardonable in a handsome widower. He made no secret of his aesthetic euphoria, even though the rigours of jail life, and the exacting obligations of office, left very little time for "pleasure".

Mountbatten, a "man for all seasons", was as adroit in diplomacy as he was dynamic in action. It is not what he did, but the way he did it, that won him approbation even for his blunders. It will be for the future historian to pass judgment on the wisdom or folly of partition and to apportion the responsibility for this fatal decision. But one does not have to wait till then to declare that having agreed to partition, Congress leaders would have been well advised to nominate an Indian as the first Governor-General, at least after it had become known that Mountbatten was not acceptable as Joint-Governor-General to both dominions. Either there should have been joint consultations before the recommendations were made, or the request of Mountbatten, after Jinnah had nominated himself, for leaving to India the choice of nominating an Indian should have been accepted.

During the year he was Governor-General, Mountbatten did a great deal for India. But however much he tried he could not extend to India the same loyalty, and partiality, as Jinnah could to Pakistan. In the line of priorities, England and the Commonwealth had first place in his mind and India the second. His constant endeavour, naturally, was to reconcile the interests of both, and to avoid hurting Pakistan lest this should hurt the Commonwealth. He was too powerful a personality to act as a mere constitutional figurehead. On the other hand, he was in the enviable position of taking credit for successes and blaming others for lapses or failures. It is to his credit that he "pulled up" Jinnah several times, and warned him against rash actions. But this only annoyed Jinnah, who for some reason expected that, even though Mountbatten was the Governor-General of India, as a former representative of the Crown and a Britisher he was expected to favour Pakistan.

Mountbatten helped to secure the signatures of almost all

the four hundred-odd Princes to the treaty of Accession before the transfer of power. Left to themselves, the Indian leaders would have achieved this result in any case, perhaps with less financial commitments for the future. But where history is bound to be critical of Mountbatten is his soft-pedalling with Baroda, Junagadh, Bhopal and Jodhpur, and his questionable role in Kashmir and Hyderabad.

Mountbatten and Ismay had specially gone to Srinagar and stayed there for a few weeks before Independence. They advised Hari Singh to take a firm and early decision "in favour of Pakistan". They even hinted that in doing so they were also expressing the views of Nehru and Patel. Fortunately his new Prime Minister, Mehr Chand Mahajan, who later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was a man of sound judgment and broad vision. On his advice the Maharaja tactfully "fell ill" during the final stage of Mountbatten's visit. Mountbatten could not get a "yes" before his departure.

It was strange that even Gandhi should have gone to Mountbatten and not to Nehru or Patel before commencing his last fast. Stranger still that he should have, at the "suggestion of Mountbatten" made the payment of Rs 55 crores to Pakistan as a pre-condition to breaking his fast.³ The Congress Government never wanted to back out of this commitment. But there was nothing wrong in its demanding assurances of good behaviour from Pakistan before the commitment was implemented. An Indian Governor-General would not have advised Gandhi to lay down such a condition and embarrass the Indian Government. The result was that while Gandhi got all the assurances of good behaviour from Hindus and Sikhs in India, Pakistan got the money and retained the freedom to continue its war of extermination and expropriation against Sikh and Hindu citizens.

³ Gandhi's last fast was for the restoration of communal amity. India was to pay Pakistan Rs 55 crores. The Government was reluctant to do so till other disputes were settled. Mountbatten advised Gandhi to make this payment a condition for breaking his fast.

There were occasions when Mountbatten with his great influence with the Cabinet at home could have helped India more than an Indian Governor-General. But he did not. He could have certainly controlled or at least discouraged British Army and civilian officials from becoming a party to violent anti-Indian activities in Pakistan. Through Sir George Cunningham, the Governor of the Frontier, he must have known for a very long time, that organized efforts were being made to mobilize the Frontier tribes and to prepare them for raids on Kashmir territory. And yet, there is nothing on record to show, nor was it evident then, that he passed on to India the benefit of this information, or used any pre-information to dissuade British officers from becoming parties to a wanton aggression.

One can recount many major and minor lapses on the part of Mountbatten. And yet, top-most Congress leaders, Nehru particularly, placed such reliance on his wisdom, ability and statesmanship that it seemed almost pathetic. In fact, it redounds to the credit of Mountbatten that up to the last day he retained this confidence. His powerful personality made even wrong advice seem convincing.

June 2nd was the last day of the Mountbattens in India. In the Gandhi Grounds, amidst laudatory speeches, shrill cries of "Mountbatten Zindabad", and a moundful of garlands, the Mountbattens took leave of the gathering. Next day they left for England, leaving Chakravarty Rajagopalachari in charge of the Viceregal palace: the first Indian Governor-General of Free India.

Rajaji⁴ had nothing royal about him except his name. Physically, if Gandhi was tweedledum, he was tweedledee. After Gandhi's death he was the nearest in looks to Mickey Mouse. Like Gandhiji, Rajaji kept his head completely shaven, allowing the ears to protrude abnormally, and the neck to seem shrunken in proportion. Like Gandhiji, Rajaji was lean, but, unlike Gandhi, Rajaji had a sharp, shrill voice, a malevolent grin and a lacerating tongue. He wore dark glasses which made him seem all the more inscrutable. Instead of

⁴ Raja: King.

chosing a more plebeian place for holding his court, Rajaji readily decided to retain the red-bricked, 300-roomed palace built for the British moghuls. The Cabinet consented. Thus the "dhoti" dynasty was installed in Government House. It was later known as Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Rajaji was not entirely new to an exalted life, although his own house in Madras was of modest dimensions. As Governor of Bengal, he occupied the magnificent house which Lord Curzon built, and which had served as Viceregal residence till the capital shifted to Delhi. Capricious Lady Willingdon had spent a few lakhs introducing Lilac glamour in Viceroy's House. Rajaji spent several thousands to give a khadi veneer to the costly interior decorations.

While khadi did cover a multiplicity of extravagances, it could not go far enough. Khadi, for example, provided no substitute for the rich red and gold sashes worn by a whole regiment of stewards, butlers and bearers working in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Then there was the Viceregal bodyguard, the most colourful of horse riders, trained and maintained in accordance with the traditions of the King's bodyguard in London. Rajaji and his successors decided to retain it. They had also to retain, "sans khadi", their lace turbans, their sky-blue gaberdine tunics, their white Hussar-style tights, with their spurs, spears and jackboots.

Rajaji and his successors, except for Dr Zakir Hussain, were predominantly rice-eating vegetarians. In fact, the change in the table menu from mushroom soup, chicken *a la king*, plum pudding and fresh asparagus with mint sauce, to *masala dosai*, boiled rice, *rasam*, crisp banana wafers, *warai*, yoghurt, puris and *moong ka halwa* was in the nature of a gastronomic revolution. Rajaji also wanted sartorial changes. The first problem he faced was to reconcile the *dhoti* with sartorial formalities imposed by protocol. Foreign diplomats presenting credentials came in formal attire, so did the officers of the foreign office. Rajaji had a brainwave. He designed simple, ornamental khadi overalls, a cross between an academic gown, and a night-shirt, in different colours and hues to distinguish protocol status.

These were to be worn by everyone attending the Governor-General's court, over any other kind of formal or informal dress. Vallabhbhai Patel rejected the plan. "My dhoti and kurta are good enough," he declared. "I refuse to wear anything else." Nehru laughed at the idea as too theatrical to be taken seriously. Having failed, Rajaji himself introduced two sartorial changes in his own attire. He began wearing a pair of woollen trousers under his dhoti. This was almost like a girl wearing jeans under a skirt. On formal occasions Rajaji removed the dhoti and, over the trousers, wore a huge coat, a village tailor's version of a cross between a long coat and a soldier's tunic. In summer he carried a folded towel on the shoulder. On informal occasions he balanced it on the left shoulder. On formal occasions it was placed on the right shoulder.

Rajen Babu⁵ moved into the Viceregal Palace as India's first President. Instead of the British Royal Anthem, the Indian National Anthem was introduced. Sartorial changes were made to suit a "Socialist" pattern. A circular defined "national dress" for formal and informal occasions.⁶ The dhoti was given no official recognition. But many top leaders still preferred to sport their dhoti. The achkan and churidars curiously enough had been the court dress of the princely order. Only a fraction of the common people could afford such a dress. The tunic and trousers had been worn by petty Indian officials, junior clerks and other subordinate functionaries since the days of the East India Company. It was the dress of the "babus", a euphemistic distortion of the word "baboon".

Rajen Babu himself had hitherto been a nonconformist in sartorial matters. Even as a minister, Rajen Babu wore a long, all-purpose coat buttoned up to the neck. He had a rich crop of dark hair which looked wild being only occasionally exposed to the casual operations of a barber. His Gandhi cap changed angles all day, since it was either too loose or too small. He

⁵ Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

⁶ A black achkan and white pyjamas or a white tunic buttoned to the neck and black trousers, a reverse combination of the above, or all white or all black, could serve as a formal national attire.

had bushy moustache, falling indifferently over the upper lip, and even sometimes carrying the tell-tale marks of a hurried meal. Rajen Babu was tall, well-built and, despite his neglectful make-up, handsome.

Rajen Babu struggled hard to adapt himself to the ways of Rashtrapati Bhavan. His Military Secretary,⁷ a charming Bengali Officer, took his sartorial affairs in hand. A special tailor was commissioned to drape the Rashtrapati both in elegant achkans and tunic-style jackets with well-fitting trousers. Rajen Babu looked elegant in "formal" and "informal" attire. But no one could do anything to keep his cap in place! Rajen Babu enjoyed among other things a drive in one of the many horse carriages he had inherited, down Rajpath on summer evenings. Admirers stood by to cheer him. During the drive he enjoyed wearing a *dhoti*, baring his feet, and clipping or cleaning his toe nails. Whenever the Military Secretary politely referred to this operation as "undignified", Rajen Babu protested, saying that he had seen even "Rajas and Nawabs doing it".

Rajen Babu and his wife had several children and grand children, an aged sister and a whole brood of other dependents. The Viceregal palace had never anticipated providing for a family so large, nor had adopted rules of security or protocol for so many members of one family used to orthodox living. Typical of an unusual problem was the *nahan*, a quasi-sacred bath in the river on festive occasions. The President's wife, sister and other dependents once went for one of these festive baths duly escorted by aides and security personnel. On reaching the river they entered the ladies' enclosure, and disappeared in the vast sea of *dhoti*-clad, semi-nude female pilgrims. The bewildered aides and security staff reported the situation to Headquarters. An SOS was sent to the nearest police station to despatch a few women police to help security. After the bath the ladies returned unaware of the commotion they had caused. Rajen Babu himself caused some consternation when he decided on a ceremonial occasion to feed a hundred priests.

⁷ Maj.-General Chatterjee.

When the pictures of a hundred brahmins in dhoties and pig-tails with the President (naked in a mini-dhoti) serving food to them appeared, the "secularists" were manifestly shocked.

I can't forget Independence Day, the year India became a Republic. It was open house at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Invitations were sent to five thousand guests. The invitees brought their children, friends and relations on their own. They brought their own sweets, their own balloons, and sprawled everywhere. Rajen Babu was very happy ! The presence of so many informally attired citizens enjoying themselves seemed to have taken away from his mind some of the guilt of living in such lavish surroundings. Rajen Babu found the experiment heartening. After the experiment was over, the choice blooms in the Mughal Gardens had been taken away as souvenirs. Children had freely contributed to the lotus ponds and cascading fountains, while some of the visitors had taken shelter behind jasmine arbours in search for conveniences. After the party was over, Col. Chatterjee had a harried look. "No more of these public exhibitions of private discomfort," he said.

Making allowance for personal aberrations, or changes in ritual, the life in Rashtrapati Bhavan has moved in accordance with pre-Independence traditions. The "Dhoti" Dynasty has preserved the pomp and the formalities of the British, with all its extravagance, uptill this day, making the socialist pattern indistinguishable from the British or the Moghul pattern of Court life. Compared to the life of living royalties, the Indian Rashtrapati enjoys greater splendour and pomp: more royal than any royalty !

33

The Pillars of Government

"Hold on there!" said an agitated cop watching one of the traffic islands on Michigan Avenue in Washington (D.C.) "Boss, didn't you see that red light?" The short man wearing a charcoal gray Saville Row suit, a black bowler hat, gray spats on his black Oxfords, smoking an expensive cigar, gently pulled down his umbrella, looked at the cop affronted. "Do you know who I am? Bajpayee is the name. I am the Ambassador from India". "I am sorry, sir," said the cop, touching his peak cap. Before the new ambassador, who was crossing over to reach the Chancery, had gone out of hearing, another cop asked curiously, "Who was that guy, the Agha Khan?" Said the first cop: "Says he is an ambassador. Some kind of pie." Observed the second cop: "Ambassador or Agha Khan. If he does not look out, he will be a mince pie one of these days."

Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai was Brahmin, Cambridge and "I.C.S." all rolled into one. Sir Girja was a competent officer. He rose very rapidly to some of the top positions in the service hitherto denied to Indians. He had all the qualities of a successful bureaucrat. He was a brilliant speaker. He combined ability with tact, and snobbery with servility. In the Assembly, as a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, he defended the treasury benches more ardently and effectively than many of his European colleagues. He rolled his r's and struggled with his diphthongs more laboriously than a British undergraduate. In general behaviour towards common folk he was more arrogant and less approachable than any of his European collea-

gues. His last assignment before independence was as representative (in Washington) of the then British-run Government of India. One hesitated to speculate as to the fate he and many like him, guilty of many unpatriotic acts, had in store for them after Independence.

Vallabhbhai Patel was a realist. As Home Minister, he soon realised that the highest merit in a civil servant was his ability to obey policy directives and to implement them loyally with competence and ability. If, he argued, the Indian members of the civil service and the defence services were capable of keeping to this code of conduct, though with an emphasis on servility, when a foreign government was in power, then there was every reason to trust that they would act even more efficiently under a national government, whose policies were in accord with patriotism. On the eve of independence, some of the finest Indians were in top jobs. Because their promotions had been regarded, in ability and experience many of them were far superior to their British colleagues. They were also in no way inferior to men occupying comparable positions in other advanced countries.

Instead of serving as the tools of a coercive alien imperialism, they were now expected to be the promoters of a people's democracy. Free India offered an agreeable challenge to their competence. But it took some time before they could forget the lapels of British tail coats and transfer their loyalty to the new khadi-wearing masters of the Republic. As was to be expected, there was an interesting interplay of pride and resistance on both sides during the transitional period. The politicians began sorting out the officers most suitable to them. The officers began sorting out the ministers whom they could most agreeably serve.¹ Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai represented, in some ways, an ideal civil servant. Soon after independence, instead

¹ Vallabhbhai Patel preferred hard-headed realists to theorists. In V. P. Menon, V. Shankar, Vellodu, C. C. Desai, Venkatachari, Vishwanathan, K. B. Lal, etc. He collected some of the finest products of the service. In Girja Bajpai, Raghavan Pillai, K.P.S. Menon, Dutt, Nehru found what he liked most: men of refinement with a scholarly bent; part sophists, part snobs.

of being arraigned for past sins, he was appointed Secretary-General to the Prime Minister and also in charge of External Affairs.

It was only natural for the Secretaries and the Under Secretaries in their turn to surround themselves with trusted men of their own, sometimes from the same religion, region or caste. The junior clerks and the *chaprasis* however had no such choice. They transferred loyalties, but were rarely transferred to suit individual preferences of top seniors. Once employed, the job existed for them, not they for the job. As an institution, the *chaprasi* had nothing comparable in any other part of the world. He was the last official rampart between the government and the common man. He was not merely an attendant or an usher, but became a know-all handyman. Many *chaprasis* were now considered indispensable, because of their cooking. Several cooks were promoted to be *chaprasis*. A *chaprasi* by day could be butler, barber, masseuse or washerman to the boss, outside office hours. The *chaprasi* knew a lot about the bosses' household and carried in his bosom the secrets of his boss and even his wife. The *chaprasis* had a free-masonry of their own. They knew all the popular astrologers and what they had foretold about the bosses. They knew the names and addresses of trusted bootleggers, dependable mistresses, the rate of consumption of liquor in different homes, and how to camouflage a drink party into a card party at short notice. Thus while Ministers and Secretaries started governing the country, the clerks and the *chaprasis* held control of the Secretariat.

The Indian Army was made up of commissioned officers and *jawans*. "Jawan" was not an equivalent to "Tommy" or "G.I.". The "Jawan" had no comparable type among any of the armies of the advanced countries of the world. The "Jawan" was a professional soldier whom the British treated as gun-fodder for emergencies. The "Jawan" lived in isolation from common folk, underwent severe training, made a good soldier, and, until independence, bothered little as to whom he shot provided it was under orders. He had fired at the Chinese in

Shanghai, the Japanese in Singapore, the Germans in Flanders, Tobruk and Tripoli, the Turks in Gallipoli, and his own people, as and when called upon, as part of his duty. The Indian "Jawan" was the cheapest to be had for the service he rendered. He was now out to serve his country.

India inherited the nucleus of an Air Force and a Navy. But it took some years before India could have a sizeable navy and an effective air force. For peace-time purposes, and for normal defence, India was well provided. But the Indian Army was anything but a people's army. It was an army of professional soldiers hitherto deprecatingly referred to as mercenaries. Indian officers had prematurely stepped into the shoes of the British. They had adopted their ways and methods and seemed initially to be as great strangers to their own people as the British were to Indians. In arms and equipment, the army was far from being modern. Mule teams and camel batteries were still as much its exhibits as its anachronisms. The amenities and comforts the officers expected, even during war, near the front lines, were almost equal to what they were offered in base camps. What moved with the Indian Army were less guns, tanks and armour, and more tents, carpets, beds, chairs, bath tubs, service plates and utensils. Since the "defensive" aspect of the army was continuously emphasised by the Prime Minister and others, and the Army was virtually referred to as a "Shanti Sena", the officers and men were inclined to emphasise comfort more than soldierly austerity.

In production, in presentation and collecting of news and in editorial comment, the Indian Press had established high standards. Some of the editors and journalists were even now among the ablest in the profession. The limitations that restricted the freedom of the press or militated against its becoming a more forceful exponent of public opinion were not legislative but organizational. Under the British the fear of iron chains or a whole series of coercive measures, threatened press freedom. These also served as a challenge which journalists had to meet. After independence silver chains made more "cowards" of many a star writer than penal restrictions. To

insure big salaries and expensive comforts one naturally had to first serve those who controlled the papers, and only then the common people. With independence, editorial salaries had spiralled up to impressive figures.² Most Editors therefore struggled between the prudence of self-interest and the abandonment of self-expression. The result was higher salaries and controlled opinions. With fabulous investments at stake, "responsible editors" could not play ducks and drakes with policy. At the same time high circulations had to be built up to attract maximum advertising at the highest rates. Unless readers felt attracted and interested high circulations were not possible. Proprietors therefore were prepared to pay high salaries to able editors, who combined tact with adaptability. Failing that, a few preferred to become "Editors" themselves.³ Through this process of orientation and adaptation to changed conditions, the Indian Press began to attract at its helm as much ability as elevated ignorance. Just as anyone, however ignorant, could, with the support of the High Command, become a Minister, any one who had a proprietor's confidence, however incompetent, could become a managing editor. The Indian Press could therefore be appropriately described as a capably edited institution working under proprietorial control through "confidence" men where necessary, in an atmosphere of legal freedom.

The radio had been a medium for informing and moulding public opinion even more powerful than the press. The All

² I have known the joy of suffering for a cause in penury, and have also tasted the pleasure of working in opulence. But I can never forget the sleepless nights I spent trying to adapt myself to my changed environment: serious efforts made to "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's".

³ A Bombay editor took up cudgels against Prohibition. It was one of the most stupid legislations adopted out of misguided piety. The Chief Minister disapproved of the criticism. He believed in the "freedom" of the Press, but also felt his Government equally free to cut off the paper from its advertising programme. Government had become by now a big advertiser and could employ silver bullets to browbeat adverse criticism. The editor upheld his views vigorously. The proprietor felt the pinch. The manager, whose nearest claim to journalism was high-speed stenography, was overnight promoted to Managing Editorship.

India Radio, under the British, was entirely controlled by the Government and made no pretence of being a free, unbiased purveyor of news and views. During the years following Independence, All India Radio enlarged its services considerably. It built up one of the largest networks of stations in the world. It had a fast system of relaying news. Its spoken word in many languages reached people in some of the remotest villages where a newspaper was not seen for days. Its listening audience, literate and illiterate, exceeded by millions the combined circulation of all the newspapers of India. One would have expected that All India Radio would set worthy standards of objectivity and offer a healthy forum for free expression of public opinion necessary for a developing democracy. But the Government allowed less freedom and less initiative to radiomen engaged in news-gathering and views-presentation than was available to editors under private proprietors. News blackouts became a regular and continuous feature of All India Radio. Subjects chosen for talks and more often the speakers followed the official line. Even the entertainment offered was of a synthetic and pre-fabricated variety. If some metropolitan papers were derisively called by detractors the "Jute Press", the All India Radio could more appropriately be referred to as "His Master's Voice".

It was in this environment that parliamentary democracy began to function in India.

Lamp Posts and Parliament

"Don't you call Nehru a bull, you foul-mouthed, dirty-minded Babu," protested the formidable Harijan woman who had left her broom outside the polling booth. She had come to cast her vote.

India was having her first general election. The constitution which declared India a Federal Republic had been formally adopted by the Constituent Assembly on January 26, 1950. Attempts had been made by legal and constitutional pandits then crowding the Constituent Assembly to provide for all kinds of eventualities. Every adult citizen was entitled to a vote. One hundred and seventy million men and women were enfranchised to vote in the first general election. To make it convenient and intelligible for the illiterate to exercise their vote, the Election Commissioner had asked different parties to select their separate symbols. These symbols were printed against the name of every candidate. The voter had merely to put a cross against the symbol of his or her preference. The symbol of one party was an earthen lamp, of another the bicycle, of a third a hut, of a fourth the umbrella.

No less than a few dozen symbols had been adopted for as many parties, big and small. A pair of bullocks yoked to a plough represented the Congress. To the ignorant and the illiterate the Congress was Nehru. The Harijan woman and millions all over India knew nothing about the candidates concerned. They knew very little about the issues involved. They had heard about the Congress and the Mahatma. These were

symbolised by "Nehru". "I want to vote for Nehru," the Harijan woman had told the polling officer. "You see those bulls, that is Nehru." It was this unguarded reference to Nehru which provoked the Harijan woman. She was almost running out for her broom to give full expression to her wrath when the polling officer explained that Nehru was head of the Congress and the two bulls symbolised the Congress. If she wanted to vote for Nehru's candidate, she should put a cross against the bulls and cast her vote in the ballot box.

During his first visit to the United States, Truman had given Nehru a statistical summary of his election campaign: the miles he had covered, the number of meetings he had addressed, the number of people who had attended the meetings, the processions and the receptions, the number of hands he had shaken and the number of babies he had kissed. After his election tour in 1953 Nehru said to me cheerfully, "Multiply everything ten times, except the hand-shakes and the kisses". "What are the chances of congress candidates?" I asked. "Some who have been put up are just gadhas (donkeys), but they will all be elected," he said. I then told him a story about Poincare, one-time Prime Minister of France. He laughed.¹ Nehru then observed solemnly, "Even gadhas will be elected, but rest assured none of them will become ministers." Mrs Sarojini Naidu said in a mood of triumph, "Even if a lamp post had been given a Congress ticket, it would have been elected." Nehru felt a sense of rare personal triumph! The manner in which almost everyone whom Nehru supported, and some he had not even met or known, received overwhelming support made him feel like a magician.

If during the elections the Congress had not gone all out for quantity, but essentially for quality, preferring able, competent candidates, the congress would have undergone a political

¹ Poincare was once strolling along a road in a French suburb when he heard a peasant cursing a "minister". At the same time the farmer was goading a donkey with his stick. Poincare first thought the curses were directed at him. It was however explained to him later that in that part of France a donkey, because of the variety of service it rendered, was called "minister".

rebirth. But this was a stage when top congress leaders felt confident that two or three dozen old congress heroes who still survived could, between themselves, pull the country forward along a charted programme, and what they expected of the party-men whose election they favoured was unstinted support. Loyalty was preferable to ability. Thus many competent and honest men left to join other parties, either because they found the Congress ideology and the pace of progress unsatisfactory, or because they felt frustrated and found subservience a high price for patronage.

Parties like nature allow no vacuum. Thus while the Congress lost the 1942 leadership in dribs and drabs, its post-1946 flock of power-seekers increased by leaps and bounds. Even those who dreaded meeting or entertaining a Congress leader in 1942 or attending a congress meeting, rushed to swell the Congress ranks. In the Indian states which represented more than one-third of the total territory and one-third of the population, the Congress had not existed before 1947. Here petty rulers, feudal chieftains, indigent nawabs and odd characters with a *Praja Mandal* background became active participants in the struggle for power.

The Elections were a costly affair. Ostensibly no candidate was expected to spend more than ten thousand rupees on his election. The number of those who during the different elections succeeded by spending this modest sum would be very small. Quite a few successful candidates had to spend a hundred to two hundred thousand. These personal expenses were in addition to what the parties had to spend to insure the success of their candidates.² Before the general elections, a legislation was adopted, permitting industrial and business houses to make such contributions as they wished to the funds of any political party. The Congress being in power became by far the greatest beneficiary. Congress leaders by sponsoring this legis-

² According to a statement made by Mr S. K. Patil who had been closely associated with almost every election fought by the Congress since 1937, the Congress party expenses on these elections averaged at two and a half crores or more per election.

lation wanted to make it easy for their friends and supporters to provide large funds, not realizing that in the process they were subserving their independence and their integrity to the dictates of such patrons.

Big business houses openly voted lakhs of rupees to Congress funds, apart from channeling unaccounted black-market contributions through diverse sources to insure the personal election of some of their favourite leaders. Congress tickets were allotted to Rajas, Maharajas, Chieftains and big-business magnates, so that apart from looking after their own election they could provide funds to the party for the election of some of their associates standing from subordinate Constituencies. Naturally those who had to provide these funds looked forward in due course to getting concessions from Congress Governments to earn back many times more, to make up for past contributions, as also to provide for future requirements.

Nehru had said again and again before the elections, "Candidates chosen should not only possess integrity but be known to do so. They should also have certain ability and capacity." A team of reporters went out to assess the educational background and literary interests of members in the lower House. The results were revealing. Only thirty per cent read serious literature, beyond newspapers and pamphlets. Fifteen per cent owned a sizeable library. Twelve per cent did not subscribe to any newspaper. Ten per cent had graduated, and a conspicuous few had studied abroad. Fifteen per cent had studied beyond high school. Thirty per cent called themselves "self-educated". Sixty per cent gave their profession: "Politics".

Vallabhbhai the Valiant

"Is Mr V. P. Menon in?" I asked. V.P. had now become Secretary of the Department of Indian States under Vallabhbhai Patel. Vallabhbhai was Deputy Prime Minister and also Minister for Indian States, Home Affairs, Information and Broadcasting. The person I had addressed was wearing a Gandhi cap, a sloppy *khadi* shirt and flapping white pyjamas creased and crumpled to a degree, inexcusable even in a better type of attendant. It had become difficult, during this period of transition, to distinguish a *chaprasi* from a Minister. Both dressed alike. In the present case I had made a mistake. The person I had addressed was a Minister! More. He was a newly appointed Chief Minister of one of the States in Central India.

Intrigued by my confusion, V.P. reminded me that the Congress had never directly functioned in Indian States. In most of the big States Congress nuclei had been improvised out of *Praja Mandals* and State People's Committees. In others, Congress committees had been practically hand-picked by the Sardar after Independence. "In the present case," he said. "I had no choice. The ruler wanted to transfer power to a 'popular' ministry. No 'popular' party existed in the State. He, therefore, started a Congress Committee of his own. The gentleman whom you met outside is an ex-'Captain'. He is the only one in the 'Congress Committee' who has seen the inside of a prison for two days and of a college for a few months. He says he studied up to the Intermediate before joining the army. Hence I and the ruler recommended his

name to the Sardar. He is now 'Chief Minister'. He is here to settle the names of the rest of his Cabinet."

My own visit to V.P. was in connection with a similar problem. V.P., on behalf of the Ministry, and I non-officially had been engaged in helping the ruler of Gwalior to transfer power to a popular ministry. In transferring power, the young ruler, Sir Jiwaji Rao Scindia had made no political reservations. The local States People's organization, which had been fairly active for several years, was converted into a wing of the Indian National Congress and was invited to form the ministry. I was entrusted with the task of assessing the eligibility for the Cabinet and for Chief Ministership of the likely candidates. I was deeply impressed by a capable, politically alert lawyer, Jagmohan, but he was not officially in the Congress. Takhtmal Jain, another lawyer, had already been a member of the ruler's Council of Ministers, and seemed eligible. But he had not yet taken to *kiwadi*. The search took me into the heart of the city, where a young apothecary was manufacturing rare herbs into potent medicines. I met a writer who had made many emotional contributions in prose and poetry to the national movement. Third on the list was an unassuming, tall, delightfully modest lawyer, who simplified his domestic needs through self-help, and spent most of the time organizing Congress committees rather than in arguing doubtful cases. Ghole, the apothecary's son, Vijayavarghi the writer, and Liladhar Joshi, the lawyer, all were on my list. I had come to consult V.P. They all were included in the Cabinet, but it was the unassuming, dhoti-sporting, "home cooking" Liladhar Joshi who became the Chief Minister.

I had gone to see Vallabhbhai during his illness that later proved fatal. This time we were discussing the integration of Gwalior, Indore and about two dozen other States into a single unit. The Union was later named Madhya Bharat. While waiting in the outer lounge I met Vyas who for years had done disinterested service to newspapers by reporting events from the major States of Rajasthan and charging practically nothing beyond postage and out-of-pocket expenses. He was all smiles

and giggles. The Sardar had just nominated him Chief Minister of Rajasthan. A few months later he was to be succeeded by another political worker whom I knew very well, Tikaram Paliwal. Tikaram had been a teacher in one of the nationalised schools set up by us in the rural areas of Delhi.

Except for Baroda, Kashmir and Hyderabad, the accession of practically all the other States had been completed before Mountbatten left. But accession only immobilised the State rulers against manoeuvring for secession. It still left them in sovereign control of their territories. India could not long remain half feudal and half democratic. Left to himself, Nehru would have preferred to liquidate the princes by mobilising the State people's organizations and *Praja Mandals*. He, however, soon discovered that in most cases the so-called *Praja Mandals* and State People's Committees had functioned in British India and not in the States concerned. Their chief leaders had lived outside their home States, or had been excommunicated for one political offence or the other. He also discovered that in many cases fake *Praja Mandals* and State Committees had been set up by the rulers themselves to bluff the British and the Congress. Their leaders were puppets or dummies. The people in the States were still terribly servile, caste-ridden, parochial-minded and communal. Distinctions between the Rajputs and the Jats, between the Kachhwahas and the Rathors, between the Mahrattas and the non-Mahrattas and between the low-caste and the outcaste, were deep-rooted. The rulers had a certain hold on the people which the Congress could not easily substitute. Vallabhbhai took a practical view. He was not wedded to any ideological approach. Vallabhbhai therefore adopted every method—naked force, bargaining, cajolery, public pressure and open and covert threats—to bring about the integration of Indian States with India.

His Exalted Highness Sir Usman Ali Khan Bahadur, "Faithful Ally of the British Government", Nizam-ul-Mulk, the richest and most powerful among the princes, had hitherto proved the most truculent. He insisted on retaining his newly won independent sovereign status, demanded the return of the

Berars, and a negotiated opening to the sea at Masulipatam. In return he offered to consider signing a treaty of "mutual alliance" and friendship with India. He made it clear through a long and tortuous process of negotiations, extending over months, that if his offer was not accepted he would be prepared "to meet force with force". There were indications that powerful elements in Britain and Pakistan were willing to help in case there was a showdown. On the eve of Mountbatten's departure, he sent a delegation to tell India officially that if his terms were not accepted he would conclude a separate treaty with Pakistan, leaving it to India to accept the challenge with all its consequences. Meanwhile, British newspapers and paid propagandists of the Nizam started spreading alarmist reports, about the stockpiling of weapons by Hyderabad, the growing strength of the Hyderabad army, the large number of disciplined Razakars¹ under arms, and the possible link-up at the strategic moment between Pakistan and Hyderabad.² According to circulated reports, the Nizam had a force of 50,000 to 100,000 trained regulars and irregulars, more than 200,000 trained Razakars "determined to fight until death", a large force of Pathans and African (Siddis) all under the command of a giant-sized, corpulent, ruthless soldier, El Edroos.

British papers carried the fiction that El Edroos was greater than Rommel, and that once he let loose the Razakars and the regular army on India, and rolled out his tanks, there would be no holding him back. It was also hinted that Hyderabad had a well-trained air force which could bomb many of the metropolitan cities and rain destruction from the air. To lend credence to these reports, at the very time when Laik Ali, the new Prime Minister of the Nizam, was virtually giving an ultimatum to India, the Razakars started looting trains and pillaging Hindu homes. Hindu women were outraged and molested. Insurgent elements in Hyderabad went further. They made common cause with the Communists, who wanted a base

¹ Islamic crusaders.

² Sydney Cotton, an Australian, had been smuggling large consignments of arms by air from anywhere and everywhere into Hyderabad.

from which to operate against bourgeois elements in the country. They allowed them control of several villages in the district of Telengana from where, through pillage, blackmail, coercion and violence, and by holding rich people to ransom, they raised large sums to spread their activities in other parts of India.

The Government watched helplessly, depending on Mountbatten and Monckton³ to arrange a settlement between themselves.⁴ Nehru, otherwise impatient with the slow pace at which princes were being liquidated, supported Mountbatten. Abul Kalam Azad, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and others pleaded patience with the Nizam, to avoid communal difficulties. Vallabhbhai Patel brought matters to a crisis as soon as Mountbatten left. He insisted that the army should be invited to take action at once against the Razakars, the Communists and, if need be, against the Nizam himself. Vallabhbhai warned his colleagues that if an all-out action was not taken against Hyderabad, some other States might also rebel and even join Pakistan. Vallabhbhai found the Defence sub-committee vacillating. At one of the meetings, he picked up his files and just walked out of the meeting, saying, "I don't want to hold office if I cannot safeguard India." On that very day news came of the molestation of two nuns and the rape of many Hindu women by the Razakars. This was the last straw. Nehru went to Vallabhbhai and told him to go ahead.

Even though India's army was tied up in Kashmir and on the Western coast against Pakistan, Vallabhbhai authorised the commanders to take action at once. The Hyderabad "police" action was the second Army action soon after Independence. The date of the action was kept a complete secret even from

³ Sir Walter Monckton, legal adviser to the Nizam.

⁴ To quote V. P. Menon: "Opinion among the advisers of the Government of India was not unanimous on the question of what action should be taken in regard to Hyderabad. The section which favoured a policy of drift had a ready excuse in the bogey of large-scale communal disorders which would follow any positive action against Hyderabad. They apprehended that in Hyderabad the Hindus would be butchered in thousands... There were others who spoke of mass Muslim uprisings in South India, particularly among the Moplas."

some members of the Cabinet known for pro-Hyderabad loyalties, till the Indian forces were within fifty miles from Hyderabad. The Hyderabad Generals, acting on "private" information from British sources, started preparing to meet the Indian forces on the 15th of September. They were taken by utter surprise when the forces reached on the 13th. "Operation Polo," as it was called, had all the elements of a Hollywood production. Only the death of nearly eight hundred irregulars and Razakars, misled into action by Kasim Razvi, was an unfortunate reality.⁵ The whole operation was organized within a few days. General Rajendra Singh, who later became the Commander-in-Chief, was head of the Southern Command. Major-General J. N. Chaudhury, who later distinguished himself as the Chief of Staff during the 21 days' war with Pakistan in 1965, led the operation. In order to preserve complete secrecy, tanks were boarded on railway trucks and transported at night to within thirty miles of Hyderabad, to join the marching columns. The Army entered the city before day-break. So unexpected was the attack that a British officer, Lt. Moore, who had been deputed to blow up some of the strategic bridges before the enemy reached on the "15th", was caught with his jeep full of explosive materials returning from a late night carousal. General El Edroos, the Rommel of the Hyderabad Army, had to be suddenly woken up, and was taken into custody before he had time to get into his colourful uniform. The whole operation lasted 108 hours. The Razakars threw down their arms, many tore up their uniforms and pleaded for mercy. Kasim Rizvi was arrested.

The only one who was not asked to surrender was the sly Nizam. He peremptorily dismissed the Laik Ali Government, denounced Kasim Rizvi and the Razakars as unruly, lawless elements, and the Communists as the enemies of the State. He welcomed and then formally "invited" the invading General "to help to restore law and order in the State". He asked the

⁵ Rizvi had threatened that if the Indian armies entered Hyderabad, "the invaders will see the burning everywhere of bodies of one crore and sixty-five lakhs of Hindus".

Government of India to aid in setting up a popular administration. The Nizam's abject surrender struck terror among the princes. Vallabhbhai had used the big stick to humble the mightiest among the princely order.

A few years later, I went to Hyderabad with Prime Minister Nehru. At the end of his visit the Nizam came to see us off. The departure of Nehru was unexpectedly delayed by an hour. The Nizam waited patiently for the exalted guest. The Nizam was simply but formally dressed. He bowed thrice to greet Nehru. Then, as an added gesture, he bade farewell with folded hands, adopting the new salutation of "namaste" which had become the vogue after Independence. Nehru was deeply touched. When I remarked after the plane had left that among the princely puppets the Nizam with his tax-free privy purse of fifty lakhs was the most expensive, Nehru ignored my critical observation and said, "Did you see how he behaved? Only a great ruler knows how to offer respect to authority. He has lost his throne. He has been badly treated by his children. But he has not lost his graciousness and culture." "I did also notice," I remarked, "the absence of this last quality in the bizarre group headed by the new Chief Minister that waited at the airport." The members of the new Cabinet, I told him, waited in a most disorderly fashion, wearing all sorts of garments, talking loudly, splashing betel juice all over and impatiently edging for positions. The Chief, a midget, a little shorter than the Nizam, was trying to make up for his dwarfness by loud gestures and a lot of showing off. His colleagues, who had been recently baptized Ministers, were even more detonating in their voices and gestures. The Nizam stood dignified, silent, aloof, contempt written on his placid face. For me that had been a study in contrast!

Vallabhbhai Patel visited Baroda after the integration of the State. Maharaja Partap Singh was there to receive him. He was no longer the truculent Partap Singh, who had earlier threatened to break with India if he was not acknowledged "King of Western India". He was now a humble supplicant for small mercies. Bhopal had done more mischief to the cause of

national unity and India's solidarity than any other ruler. Soon after Mountbatten left, Vallabhbhai made it clear to him that he meant business and would no longer tolerate any nonsense. Bhopal capitulated!

In Southern India, the State of Travancore presented a different problem. The Prime Minister of Travancore, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, was the power behind the throne. He was more royal than royalty! He had the "blind" loyalty and support of the ruler's powerful mother. He had become the Rasputin of Travancore. People felt disgusted with his dictatorial ways, and of palace intrigues. He was now so unpopular that he rarely risked public appearances, except when being photographed, *sans* clothes in a ceremonial dhoti, making offerings to the State deity, God Padmanabhan. Soon after the announcement of June 3, C.P., without even obtaining the consent of his ruler, declared that Travancore had decided to become "independent". As the 15th of August came near, the people of Travancore became impatient and restive. They began agitating for the dismissal of C.P. The young ruler's sympathies were now with the people, but he was too weak to assert himself against his dominating mother. On the 27th of July, an attempt was made on C.P.'s life. The assailant however failed to do much harm, beyond inflicting a few injuries: a sharp cut on the nose and a wound on the lower lip. C.P. got cold feet and quit. The young ruler accepted integration. Soon responsible Government was granted to the people, both in Travancore and Cochin, and the two States were merged into the single State of Kerala, meaning the "land of the coconut".

Jodhpur and Jaisalmer posed a different kind of problem. They had territories contiguous both with India and Pakistan. They could not decide whether to join India or Pakistan or to remain independent. Jaisalmer was weak-minded, unprogressive and deeply wedded to feudal traditions. He decided to accept Jinnah's blank cheque, subject only to one condition. That, if there was any trouble between Pakistan and India or between Muslims and Hindus, he be allowed to side with the Hindus. This proviso left Jinnah cold. Young Hanwant Singh of Jod-

pur was neither weak nor unprogressive. But Hanwant Singh had no faith in democracy, or in Rajasthan politicians. Those known to him had given no proof either of extraordinary ability or of integrity. Hanwant Singh felt that if Jodhpur could have separate treaties with India and Pakistan it could help to stabilize the status of minorities in India and Pakistan, prevent mass exodus, and in due course create a bridge of amity between the two territories. One day Hanwant Singh spoke to V. P. Menon on these lines, when he met him in the Viceroy's House. Menon taunted him about treachery and bracketed him with Bhopal. He felt that V.P. had a one-track mind and wanted to apply to States like Jodhpur and Jaisalmer the same "accession" formula as to the other States in the interior. He lost his patience. He pulled out his revolver and would have shot V.P. if Mountbatten had not entered in time to restrain the impetuous ruler. Soon after Hanwant Singh died while piloting his own plane. Jodhpur joined the Rajasthan union.

Thus within two or three years Vallabhbhai liquidated the Indian princes as a political power and added by integration an area two and a half times that of Pakistan. He extended the boundaries of India by a territory three times larger than Bismark had added to Germany in a decade, or Hitler by his mad adventures during the first phase of World War II. He had not used bombs and bullets like Hitler, nor the coercive methods of Bismark. But in seeking the willing consent of the Princes he accepted arrangements whereby the Government agreed, on behalf of the present and future generations of Indians, to guarantee to the Maharajas, the Nawabs and the Rajas millions of rupees in tax-free pensions. They were allowed, in addition, ownership of billions of rupees in jewellery, palaces, properties, lands, shares and securities acquired with the money of the subjects. The Nizam of Hyderabad who had spent more than thirty crores on acquiring fresh armaments to join in an Islamic crusade against India received the biggest prize: a tax-free pension of fifty lakhs and a further guaranteed income from his jagirs etc. of a like amount. The

Nawab of Bhopal, who had done many things to deserve being tried for sabotaging the unity of India, was given a tax-free privy purse of eleven lakhs, and ownership of properties running into more than a crore of rupees. The way bounties were distributed among the ruling princes was like a fairy tale.

The ruler of Gwalior was among the very few who had transferred power to the representatives of his State as part of a voluntary arrangement. They voted him a privy purse of forty lakhs. When Gwalior, Indore and other States of Malwa were integrated, the re-fixing of the privy purse of the ruler was left to the States Ministry. In strictest confidence, Jiwaji Rao told me that though his existing privy purse of forty lakhs had been voluntarily guaranteed by his popular Ministers, to please the Sardar he would be willing to accept fifteen lakhs. He emphasised: "but nothing less". Gandhiji had fixed the maximum at 10 lakhs.

A few weeks later, I found myself alone with V. P. Menon, on the moonlit terrace of one of the Gwalior's jungle palaces. It had the façade of a floating ship with the terrace jutting into a lake. It had the rear of a modern Italian villa, rising out of a floral landscape. All around was an extensive forest. The palace was equipped with some of the latest American gadgets. Even the doors opened and closed with electric eyes. V. P. was in a particularly cheerful mood as he had "bagged" not one but two tigers that day. I still do not know how good or bad he was with the gun, but the way he handled the weapon, he seemed as much of an amateur as myself.⁶

⁶ Earlier in the day we were informed that three tigers had been sighted in a ravine a little distance from the palace. We drove to the edge of the lake, where shikaris on elephants were waiting for us. Scindia took charge of one of the elephants himself as mahout with V. P. and two of the shikaris in the howdah. I and one of the secretaries (Brij Raj Narain) with a shikari followed on the second elephant. A third brought provisions. I discovered that the elephant was employed to avoid alerting the tigers, since any sound within a few miles sent them to cover. The shikari handed me a gun and another to the secretary. The only shooting I had done was with an airgun as a boy and later with my camera. The entire party collected on the top of a hill overlooking a deep ravine with a stream of water flowing zigzag through a thick jungle. Frankly, I felt unsafe, despite all the

Talking about integration, he asked me if I could help in removing one of the biggest hurdles that was preventing the formation of the Madhya Bharat Union. "You will have to exercise a lot of tact and a bit of pressure," he added. Indore, he said, was hostile to integration with Gwalior. He had finally agreed after Vallabhbhai had promised him a privy purse of fifteen lakhs, and the office of permanent *Up Raj Pramukh*. The Government was willing to make Gwalior *Raj Pramukh* for life, he said, with an allowance of two-and-a-half lakhs. But they will not agree to the privy purse of forty lakhs he is now getting. I almost fell off the chair. "Considering the revenue, the population and the area of the two States, would not Gwalior," I asked, without batting an eye, "be justified in claiming at least double the amount of Indore?" V. P. did not dispute the logic, but suggested we meet the Sardar and get a final decision. When I informed the ruler he could not believe his ears. He tactfully made V. P. repeat the conversation. When the matter was later referred to Vallabhbhai he approved of a tax-free purse of twenty-five lakhs and an allowance of two-and-a-half lakhs.

In this horse-trading many rulers suffered but many gained: some, fabulous amounts. It is true that this horse-trading at the expense of the people seemed at the time an easy and convenient way of liquidating the political power of the princes. It is also true that because of the hostile forces then

shikaris around. After some patient waiting, not three but four tigers appeared treading majestically through the thickets reaching up to the stream. Then suddenly shots were fired, one after the other. Two tigers lay dead. One wounded tiger limped away groaning with a growling cub in retreat. When we reached the spot where the two tigers lay, a thorough examination of the beasts and the bullets followed. It was discovered from the bullets that one of the tigers was shot by "V. P.", the other by "His Highness". The tiger that limped away had been ostensibly shot by me. But I had not fired my gun. His Highness, however, offered his tiger to V.P. So he was trebly happy. First, that he had established himself as a crack shot. Secondly, that he could claim his "own" tiger. Thirdly, for having got an extra one as a gift. What intrigued me, however, was that His Highness did not have a gun while the shooting was going on. The mystery resolved itself when my shikari friend told me that the two tigers and the tiger that escaped had been shot by two *shikaris*, one behind V.P. and the other behind me.

at work this liquidation could not be long delayed. The future historian will however have to answer for himself the question as to whether the fabulous price paid to the princes was justified, whether this was the only practical and proper way of liquidating them, and whether their continuing for some time before political forces of extinction overtook them one by one was not the lesser evil. If Vallabhbhai and Nehru had been each ten years younger, they would have preferred to battle with these pampered satraps, refusing to be blackmailed into making settlements based on the astounding assumption that State territories were the property of the rulers. But time was of the essence!

At the time of Independence some of the ablest and most experienced Indians were employed as Ministers in the States. With the disappearance of the rulers and these able Ministers, an administrative vacuum was created in the four hundred-odd Indian States. The question one asked is, should this vacuum have been created? To fill this vacuum handpicked men chosen out of improvised Congress Committees were appointed Ministers. In the newly constituted State Ministries the emphasis was on loyalty. Thus, obscure, inexperienced, immature minds were overnight catapulted into high office, and many inept morons filled the legislatures. This resulted in corruption, mal-administration and political intrigue. It gave a bad start to democracy.

Vallabhbhai however was urgently concerned with consolidating the fragments of freedom. After Partition, time had become of the essence. He did not want India to be further divided. Besides, he realized that he did not have long to live. Instead of pursuing ideologies, he was afraid of losing the grip on realities. In one of his cryptic statements,⁷ replying to his Socialist and Communist critics, he said, "You want levelling of wealth. But where is the wealth to be levelled. Do you want distribution of property? We have not gained freedom for distribution of poverty! We have to create wealth first." In what seemed to be his last message, i.e. said: "What we have

⁷ On May 14, 1950, at Ernakulam.

is not 'Swaraj' but only freedom from foreign rule. The people have still to win internal 'Swaraj', abolish distinctions of caste or creed, banish untouchability, improve the lot of the hungry masses, and live as one joint family: in short, to create a new way of life and bring about a change of heart and a change of outlook."

On the 15th of December, Bombay, the city which Vallabhbhai the peasant lad from Karamsad village had adopted as his second home, witnessed one of the largest funeral processions since the death in the 'twenties of Lokmanya Tilak, the then uncrowned king of India. The great fighter, the great builder, the grand dictator of the Congress, Vallabhbhai received the homage of millions as his cortege passed the streets on his last voyage. According to his own wish, Vallabhbhai was cremated in the public cremation ground, where his wife, and his elder brother, Vithalbhai, had been cremated many years earlier. Another of Gandhi's great generals, battle-scarred and weary, had fallen by the roadside!

36

The Democratic Dictator

Babu Purshottam Das Tandon was seventy, and a lawyer by profession. Among the galaxy of faddists who had reached eminence in the Congress, he was a super faddist. Tandon lived on raw vegetables, uncooked rice, wheat and lentils, fresh goat's milk, and fruits. He washed his body with a type of caked clay. He abhorred soap. He idolised Hindu culture and Hindu traditions. He enjoyed burping and belching as symptoms of good health. He was a devoted patriot, courageous, fearless and dedicated. He was a man of rare integrity.

In 1950, Tandon's name was sponsored by Sardar Patel for Presidentship of the Indian National Congress. Nehru had nothing against Tandon. But, because of his fads and reactionary social views, he thoroughly disapproved of his being elected Congress President. He conveyed his feelings to Vallabhbhai. Vallabhbhai, even though ill and nearing his end, wanted Nehru to realize that he, and not Nehru, was still the Congress dictator. The candidature of Tandon was not withdrawn. An open trial of strength followed. Nehru challenged the nomination by sponsoring a rival: Kripalani. Kripalani had already been President once. He had been one of Vallabhbhai's erstwhile lieutenants. This made the situation all the more piquant and the tussle all the more personal and acute. The way the Vallabhbhaites and the Nehruites went about canvassing reminded one of the hostility of the old Scottish clans like the Macleans and Macdonalds. Tandon won.¹ Nehru was shocked. He felt humili-

¹ He got 1306 votes against 1092 for Kripalani.

liated. Vallabhbhai chuckled with satisfaction. Elated Vallabhbhaites sauntered about the lobbies like flamboyant peacocks, making a brazen show of their triumph. They even threatened to topple Nehru.

Soon after Vallabhbhai's death, Nehru took the first drastic step to dislodge Tandon. With Vallabhbhai gone, many changed loyalties. Nehru found new supporters in the Working Committee and the All India Congress Committee. To force the issue he resigned from the Working Committee. This was an indirect way to show lack of confidence in the President. Several other members followed. Tandon soon realized that he could not function any more as President. He resigned. In order not to take any chances and to establish his undisputed authority within the party, Nehru decided to become Congress President himself.² Within a month of succeeding Tandon, Nehru ordered that arrangements be made for holding a special session of the Congress. It was to be the first session in the capital after India's independence. It was also to be a sort of Coronation.

A Reception Committee was set to work. I was elected Vice-President of the Committee. The site for the session was chosen by Nehru. We were allotted unlimited space on the area where Chanakyapuri was later to be built. Official agencies and big-business cooperated with us in lightening our task. A magnificent tent city sprang up overnight, where delegates from all over India were to be lodged. A mammoth pandal was constructed. As Nehru had suggested, one wing was reserved for foreign dignitaries and diplomats. It was filled up with comfortable chairs. Another wing was reserved for rich donors. The rest of the space was duly carpeted to provide squatting space in traditional Congress style. A seven-foot high platform was raised to seat members of the Working Committee. In size alone the platform looked like the mammoth stage of an open

² At one stage, due to difficulties with Patel, Nehru had been seriously contemplating retirement from the Congress, and from the Prime Ministership. But after being elected Congress President he felt retirement was out of the question.

air theatre. The rostrum offered another ten feet of height to the speaker. To give the platform a theatrical touch, the "architect"³ had designed a hessian-framed, colourful rear, wherein instead of a green room, were located a private room for the President, a Committee room for consultations, a canteen, etc. From the roof ran white massive rolls of lent khadi creating the illusion of curtain drops. Khadi panels with murals done by leading artists made up the wings. A Moghul-style facade ran all along the front of the dias with hidden lights creating an eerie effect. On the well-carpetted platform were arranged massive Moghul-style pillows to serve as back rests.

As the dream city of gray and white khadi was undergoing its last touches, Nehru arrived for a final inspection. The spectacle pleased him. He walked up to the rostrum to survey the massive *pandal*, adorned with bunting, streamers, and stencilled slogans: quotes from the sayings of Gandhi and himself. "This is splendid," he said. The words had hardly been uttered when we heard the sound of loud explosions. In the twinkling of an eye flames rose from one of the back-stage rooms. Forgetting that he was Congress President and Prime Minister, Nehru rushed towards the room in which the flames had almost become a blaze. By a mysterious effort I pushed him backwards. Before he knew what had happened, two security men had forcibly captured the "Prime Minister" and taken him away. We feared that some time-bombs may have exploded. Actually a fuse box had burnt, causing a short-circuit. Within a quarter of an hour, before any fire engine could arrive, the *pandal* was reduced to cinders. With great difficulty, we could save a major part of the neighbouring tent city.

As soon as we could, I and a few others rushed to the Prime Minister's house to report what had happened and to find out if Nehru was safe. The Prime Minister was missing. Instead of returning to the house the Prime Minister had first sent urgent calls for fire engines and police help. He then saw a large number of cars parked unattended behind the *pandal*. Seeing the danger of flames spreading to the cars, with the

³ Mr G. C. Sharma.

help of his security men and a few others, he pushed each one of them one by one, till they were beyond danger. Behind the *pandal* were also a few workers' huts. He helped the occupants to remove their belongings and to set up galvanised sheets between their huts and the advancing flames. "You should not have done this, sir. It was taking a great risk," remarked one of my companions. Nehru smiled. His face and hands were still covered with soot. "Frankly, I forgot I was Prime Minister. I felt for once I was a boy-scout again. I hope I did a good job."

The Congress was to meet the next day. We met later at the Prime Minister's House to confer with the "Congress President", whether the session should be postponed or held in some other improvised place. Nehru sat silent for a time. Then suddenly, as if waking out of a dream, he said, "Let everything be as it is. We will never again hold a Congress session among the ashes of a grand *pandal*.⁴ Let us all work tonight to make the arrangements for tomorrow.

It was early morning before he and all of us left. At the appointed time, he, the Congress President, was received with due ceremony, and in the manner in which he had rehearsed a day earlier. He was taken in procession to the *pandal*, and then to the platform, amidst the odour of charred wood and burnt cloth, and the deafening applause of fifty thousand people. He had been Congress President half a dozen times before. This was the first time Jawaharlal himself placed the "crown of thorns" on Nehru's head! .

Writing about himself in 1936, under a *nom-de-plume*, Jawaharlal had expressed the fear that Nehru the popular hero, the pampered, favoured child of destiny, might be heading for "dictatorship": a tendency which needed to be resisted. Circumstances had now conspired to actually make him dictator, and there was no resisting him. He was Congress President, Prime Minister and the idol of millions!

Gandhi had advised the dissolution of the Congress after

⁴The incident was repeated in 1969 when the Congress Pandal at Faridabad was reduced to ashes, and the session was held among charred remains.

1947. His most ardent and trusted followers had grown out of some able students who had given up their studies a quarter of a century ago, or from lawyers who had given up their legal practice at the same time. Periodic or repeated jail-going, sacrifices and sufferings in the struggle, may have added to their popularity, but were not calculated to have added, in all cases, to their eligibility or ability for Ministerial office. A good soldier, Gandhi felt, did not always make a competent administrator. He feared that, with Congress in power, a jail ticket might become a passport to high office. The position now became worse, when many who only had a "party ticket" edged for positions of power and influence.

If the Congress had been dissolved after Independence, it is most likely that Nehru would have emerged as leader of one party and Vallabhbhai of the other. The emergence of two such parties not so widely divided in political and economic outlook would have been a healthy development for the country, and for democracy. If, again, Vallabhbhai had died before Gandhi, Nehru would not have felt a continual sense of insecurity within the party. While Vallabhbhai was alive, he could not kick back at the party. After Vallabhbhai's death, the sense of insecurity continued. Safe, loyal men were difficult to find. To remove the element of insecurity he tried to win over key party-men who had reached positions of power under Vallabhbhai, even though they did not share his political convictions. He became Gandhi, Vallabhbhai and Nehru rolled into one. He gathered around him a widening circle of party-men, Cambridge associates, and kinsmen from the Kashmiri clan. But among them he had very few confidants. There was in fact no one, except perhaps his daughter in later years, in whom he confided unreservedly.

A born exhibitionist, an actor who could simulate the pose best suited to a circumstance, the real Nehru now lived in a chrysalis of his mental creation, insulated against the consequences of his actions, feeding his ego on seeming triumphs, blaming others for set-backs and failures—feeling all the time a sense of superiority and insecurity which both increased with

the diminishing IQ of the associates around him. There were now times when Nehru spoke to you, and the real Nehru passed you by. There were other times when Nehru over-powered you with an intense emotional impact, like a depth charge from a highpowered dynamo, without even saying a word. He became a man of shocks and surprises; a man of paradoxes and contradictions. He became a man with highly strung nerves, and a will of iron; a volatile, excitable temperament and yet capable of utmost patience; a bundle of indecisions, and a man of intense action; a thinker of extraordinary depth and clarity, but invoking intuition to dictate big decisions; a man of long silences, and at the same time a voluble speaker whose resistance broke down in front of the mike.

Nehru was intensely human. He liked good food, flowers, works of art, music, plays, books, beauty in general, and attractive women. In food he was like his father an epicure and not a gourmet. Of flowers he wanted the best, but never had a gardener's enthusiasm. He liked seeing well-produced plays, scanning select books, listening to choice music, but only when he had spare time. Of these he preferred to be more of a patron than a connoisseur. Handsome physically, he could cast a spell as a conversationalist on anyone he met. Where women were concerned, these two qualities, combined with a certain amount of emotional intensity, made him irresistible. He won the hearts of many, but offered his serious loyalty to a very few. Even among these few there was no one whom he permitted to come permanently between him and his life's mission. This only emphasised his sense of loneliness. In doing so he had to deny to himself the emotional impulses he valued most, not because like Gandhi he considered them taboo, but because beyond a certain measure he valued his mission and purpose more.

If he could not clearly define the Socialism of his concept, it was because he himself was feudal in his approach to life, and socialistic only in his approach to political problems. India itself was a country to which no dogmas or theories propounded by those alien to its problems could apply. The answer to its

national allergies, individual idiosyncrasies and social and economic inequalities could not be provided either by Engels, Proudhon, Lenin or Karl Marx. Even Gandhi failed to give a complete answer. It is not surprising that Nehru should now on have felt bewildered, even though the country gave him the green signal to evolve for it a pattern of society he deemed most suitable.

37

A Classless Society

He was wearing a saffron-dyed mini-dhoti, under a white, badly-tailored mini-shirt. He escorted me to a little room. This served as bed-sitting-dining room in his double-storied, twenty-roomed mansion. His wooden slippers, with their centre knob held between the big toe and the second toe, sounded "klip-a-klap". "Sit down," he said, "pointing to a rush chair. He himself squatted on a wooden Diwan, with saffron-dyed covers on its mattress and cushions. "Lallaji",¹ as he was familiarly known, was then one of the few multi-millionaires in Delhi.

The Banyas of earlier days started life, with borrowed money, in a rented place, and out of nothing built fabulous fortunes. A big house was a prestige symbol. The Banyas ate sparingly, dressed in slovenly simplicity, and worked hard from sunrise till late after sunset. "Lallaji" was no exception. Even then his display of saffron-dyed simplicity seemed to me unusual. I asked if this was a "stunt" or a prelude to his becoming a Sadhu. "No," said Lallaji, "I have no desire to become a Sadhu. I am practising Socialism. In this I am more inclined to agree with Gandhi than Nehru. I have reduced my personal wants. I spend on myself no more than does one of my mill workers. I hope to use a greater part of my wealth as a trust, in the service of my fellow citizens."

The saffron phase did not last long. Lallaji soon returned to normal life. He did donate a large part of his immense fortune to good causes. Like many other idealistic preachings of

¹ Sir Shri Ram.

the Mahatma, the Gandhian concept of Socialism died with Gandhi.

Though Nehru believed as sincerely as Gandhi in diminishing the disparities of wealth, "class", and "caste", he made considerable allowance for pomp and ostentation in the name of party and State. Nehru himself dressed elegantly. In the twelve-acre Prime Minister's Estate, he surrounded himself with all that good taste and feudal comfort could command. But what came naturally to Nehru carried an element of *nov-riche* vulgarity where many of his colleagues were concerned. They began to look upon themselves as the privileged and the "chosen ones" and considered public funds as a private preserve, expendable at their discretion even to meet their private requirements.² Palatial buildings were either acquired or built for ministers, or to serve as exclusive guest-houses for officials and party bosses.³ Taxpayer-subsidised amenities gave to the new class the same illusion as my friend Lallaji had created for himself of spending no more than one of his mill workers on personal wants.⁴

To reduce the accumulation of wealth in private hands, and to accelerate the process of rapid industrialization, a large number of essential industries involving hundreds of crores of investment were started by the state. These represented the "public sector". In setting up Railways, establishing the tele-

² Dijlas (of Yugoslavia) in his book *The New Class* writes : "By various methods such as nationalization, compulsory co-operation, high taxes and price irregularities, private ownership was destroyed... country homes, the best housing furniture and similar things were acquired, special quarters and exclusive rest-houses were established for the elite of the new Class.". p. 57.

³ A well-furnished, double bedroom in these palatial establishments cost Rs 5/- per day. Similar hotel accommodation cost a private individual more than ten times. The rates for three square meals and two teas were at places Rs 10/- to Rs 15/- per day. In Cochin, in the aristocratic state guest-house overlooking the sea, for a suite consisting of a very large sitting room, an office, a colossal bedroom with separate dressing rooms and bathrooms the charges were Rs 40/- for two including excellent meals.

⁴ According to estimates made by critical members in the Lok Sabha, a Minister's emoluments, inclusive of tax-free perquisites, came to over three lakh rupees a year.

graph and the telephone systems, putting up ordinance factories, or controlling mines, the purpose the British had was to control public utilities for effective administration. This was state ownership. The new state now started acquiring control of aviation, life insurance, banks, natural oil resources, dry docks, ship yards, radio, television, milk supply, transport and a score of big and small industries. In no country in the world had a democratic Government acquired in such a short time control of such vast industrial, commercial and public utility enterprises and financial resources as the Congress Government did in the two decades of independence. Although rightly impatient to set up and enlarge the public sector, the Congress did not have in the party, or in the Government, competent technocrats or men of administrative experience or ability to manage these colossal undertakings involving billions. What was designed to promote economic expansion, in actual practice resulted in a most inefficient, and a thoroughly amateurish and gravely mismanaged, bureaucratically run form of state capitalism.⁵

As a further step towards socialisation a whole range of throttling controls were introduced at various levels so that, except the tempers of the opposition and the amenities of the ministers, very little remained uncontrolled.⁶ While some control may have been necessary, the administration of controls was, not just faulty, but profoundly annoying. Few at the top realized what these controls meant to the common citizen in waste of time, physical discomfort, humiliation and frustration.

⁵ Dijlas in his book *The New Class* writes: "It is the bureaucracy which finally uses, administers, and controls both nationalized and socialized property, as well as the entire life of society." This process of extended state control or nationalization, he writes, has "the origin of a new form of ownership, of a new ruling class". According to Dijlas the new class cannot assume its oligarchic power unless it endeavours to eliminate other classes. Hence the cry for a "Classless Society".

⁶ Licensed imports controlled practically every industry in the country. Then there was control on cement and bricks, control on kerosene and spirit, control on cereals and sugar, control on fuel and chemicals, control on water supply and electricity, control on foreign travel, on gold and—the least successful of all—birth control.

A man or his wife had to wait mornings in queue for a doubtful half pint of milk. They had then to line up for a kilogram of coal. Once a week, for the weekly ration. The common man had to queue at bus stops, at railway stations, before clerks to obtain ration cards for sugar, cereals and kerosine, outside hospitals to obtain medical attendance, at postal windows to deposit money or to get a stamp.

In order to meet a soaring bill of expenditure, on losing enterprises and an expanding army of employees, the Government resorted to a policy of taxation which, in terms of its variety and incidence, had no parallel in any country in the world. Two men stand out conspicuously whom Nehru handpicked to implement the socialistic commitments of the Congress party. T. T. Krishnamachari was an astute Brahmin hailing from Madras. He started life as a sales agent for a British set-up in Bombay. He resigned to join politics. He became a member of the Legislative Assembly. In later years he joined the Congress party. Morarji Desai hailed from Ahmedabad. He had served as an executive in the British administration, but resigned in response to Gandhi's appeal to public servants to withdraw their cooperation from the British. Morarji Desai shared only one thing with Nehru. They belonged to the same party. He considered Gandhi his spiritual guide, and Vallabhbhai Patel his political guru. Starting as a Minister in the Bombay Cabinet, he rose to be the Chief Minister. Like Vallabhbhai he was strong, efficient, and obstinate. Like Vallabhbhai he was neither a leftist nor a rightist.

Only in one matter did Morarji Desai discard realism and slip into the morass of Idealism. Being a tee-totaler himself, he felt that, as a devotee of Gandhi, the one great reform he could introduce in Bombay by legislation was "prohibition". It was one of the most daring social legislations introduced by any state government in the world after the expensive failure of the experiment in the United States. It meant a loss of crores in revenue and an expenditure of several crores in enforcement machinery. Open drinking diminished considerably. But social and moral evils, crime and corruption resulting

from prohibition obscured totally the moral gains. Prohibition made crime profitable. The smuggler, the illicit brewer, the bottlegger, colluding with customs, excise and police officials, set up an expanding underworld of crime and corruption. Even those who never thought of a drink joined in the clandestine thrill of visiting improvised bars and "speak-easies" in which the city of Bombay suddenly began to abound. With "speak-easies" and illicit bars came the depravities of unregulated night life. It was freely said that the only liquor shop open to non-permit holders day and night was a well-known police station in the crime area. The best illicit brew came from the prisons where bottleggers were detained.

T. T. Krishnamachari originally joined the Government as Minister for Commerce. Deshmukh, his predecessor, was for giving the highest priority to capital goods. T.T.K. was liberal towards toothbrushes, cosmetics, other consumer requirements, including even foreign sweets and chocolates. Deshmukh believed that taxation should be like feathering a goose: "maximum feathers without hurting"! T.T.K. was neither a Socialist nor a financial expert. He had the flexible mind of a politician. When Deshmukh resigned, Nehru wanted someone with a Socialist bias. Dr Kalder, a leftist economist, had visited India and impressed Nehru with his unconventional ideas on taxation. T.T.K. not only started "talking Socialism" but was one of the few who began advocating that a Socialistic pattern was possible through taxation on the lines suggested by Dr Kalder. Thus T.T.K. was moved from "Commerce" to "Finance". Besides other direct and indirect taxes, he introduced the Expenditure Tax. This enthused Nehru and bewildered the economists.

Morarji was invited to join the Central Cabinet. He came with high hopes of becoming either the Home Minister or Minister for Defence with a claim to Deputy Prime Ministership. In appointing him to a stop-gap vacancy⁷ created by T.T.K., Nehru did not encourage such a hope. The unpredictable however happened. After a few years T.T.K. came under

⁷ Commerce Minister.

a cloud and resigned.⁸ Nehru did not expect this to happen. He felt bewildered why "Calpurnia" did not keep herself "above suspicion". Nehru now wanted someone to restore national confidence in the soundness of the Government's economic policies. Morarji was the only one with party influence and popular prestige. Even though Morarji did not share the economic theories of T.T.K. and had no bias for Kalder, Morarji was appointed Finance Minister. Morarji abolished the Expenditure Tax and introduced a scheme of annuity deposits to induce savings. While his financial experiments were still in the raw, Morarji lost his seat in the Lok Sabha in the elections. Meanwhile T.T.K. made a last-minute photo-finish bid to get re-elected unopposed. He was again put in charge of Finance. T.T.K. reimposed the Expenditure Tax.⁹ He pronounced the Compulsory Deposit Scheme as misconceived and amateurish. Instead he introduced the Annuity Deposit Plan. Thus through a complex, confusing, unstable and amateurish process of trial and error, these short-term Ministers developed a financial chaos which led to heavy deficit financing, a lot of avoidable waste, and a blocking of national economy.

In determining sartorial conventions and living standards, the leaders found themselves between Socialistic pulls on the one hand and the need to keep up with the standards of the diplomatic corp on the other. Most diplomats lived in a state of princely pomp and splendour out of reach even to their own ministers at home. The "V.I.P." now represented a new class. If you were not a V.I.P. you were a nobody. The V.I.P. group included diplomats, Ministers and other political big-wigs. They all used chauffeur-driven limousines, employed a battery of chaprasis, and lived in stately mansions. Thus the new Classless Society came to represent a rare motley of contrasting colours: The tattered loin-cloth, the feudal *achkan*, the tartan bushshirt, the babu's tunic, the blue decoran suit,

⁸ The financial transactions of one Mundra, a business adventurer, involving lakhs in L.I.C. investments and the Finance Ministry, led to a major scandal and a public inquiry. The inquiry left some black spots on T.T.K.'s escutcheon.

⁹ Only to abolish it within a year.

the custom-built cadillac, the stately mansions, the *jhuggies* and the *jhompries*. All these represented a rare weave of permissive economic co-existence. They constituted a feudal format for the new "Socialist" pattern, intended to obliterate distinctions between the affluent and the poor.

at work this liquidation could not be long delayed. The future historian will however have to answer for himself the question as to whether the fabulous price paid to the princes was justified, whether this was the only practical and proper way of liquidating them, and whether their continuing for some time before political forces of extinction overtook them one by one was not the lesser evil. If Vallabhbhai and Nehru had been each ten years younger, they would have preferred to battle with these pampered satraps, refusing to be blackmailed into making settlements based on the astounding assumption that State territories were the property of the rulers. But time was of the essence!

At the time of Independence some of the ablest and most experienced Indians were employed as Ministers in the States. With the disappearance of the rulers and these able Ministers, an administrative vacuum was created in the four hundred-odd Indian States. The question one asked is, should this vacuum have been created? To fill this vacuum handpicked men chosen out of improvised Congress Committees were appointed Ministers. In the newly constituted State Ministries the emphasis was on loyalty. Thus, obscure, inexperienced, immature minds were overnight catapulted into high office, and many inept morons filled the legislatures. This resulted in corruption, mal-administration and political intrigue. It gave a bad start to democracy.

Vallabhbhai however was urgently concerned with consolidating the fragments of freedom. After Partition, time had become of the essence. He did not want India to be further divided. Besides, he realized that he did not have long to live. Instead of pursuing ideologies, he was afraid of losing the grip on realities. In one of his cryptic statements,⁷ replying to his Socialist and Communist critics, he said, "You want levelling of wealth. But where is the wealth to be levelled. Do you want distribution of property? We have not gained freedom for distribution of poverty! We have to create wealth first." In what seemed to be his last message, he said: "What we have

⁷On May 14, 1950, at Ernakulam.

is not 'Swaraj' but only freedom from foreign rule. The people have still to win internal 'Swaraj', abolish distinctions of caste or creed, banish untouchability, improve the lot of the hungry masses, and live as one joint family: in short, to create a new way of life and bring about a change of heart and a change of outlook."

On the 15th of December, Bombay, the city which Vallabhbhai the peasant lad from Karamsad village had adopted as his second home, witnessed one of the largest funeral processions since the death in the 'twenties of Lokmanya Tilak, the then uncrowned king of India. The great fighter, the great builder, the grand dictator of the Congress, Vallabhbhai received the homage of millions as his cortege passed the streets on his last voyage. According to his own wish, Vallabhbhai was cremated in the public cremation ground, where his wife, and his elder brother, Vithalbhai, had been cremated many years earlier. Another of Gandhi's great generals, battle-scarred and weary, had fallen by the roadside!

36

The Democratic Dictator

Babu Purshottam Das Tandon was seventy, and a lawyer by profession. Among the galaxy of faddists who had reached eminence in the Congress, he was a super faddist. Tandon lived on raw vegetables, uncooked rice, wheat and lentils, fresh goat's milk, and fruits. He washed his body with a type of caked clay. He abhorred soap. He idolised Hindu culture and Hindu traditions. He enjoyed burping and belching as symptoms of good health. He was a devoted patriot, courageous, fearless and dedicated. He was a man of rare integrity.

In 1950, Tandon's name was sponsored by Sardar Patel for Presidentship of the Indian National Congress. Nehru had nothing against Tandon. But, because of his fads and reactionary social views, he thoroughly disapproved of his being elected Congress President. He conveyed his feelings to Vallabhbhai. Vallabhbhai, even though ill and nearing his end, wanted Nehru to realize that he, and not Nehru, was still the Congress dictator. The candidature of Tandon was not withdrawn. An open trial of strength followed. Nehru challenged the nomination by sponsoring a rival: Kripalani. Kripalani had already been President once. He had been one of Vallabhbhai's erstwhile lieutenants. This made the situation all the more piquant and the tussle all the more personal and acute. The way the Vallabhbhaites and the Nehruites went about canvassing reminded one of the hostility of the old Scottish clans like the Macleans and Macdonalds. Tandon won.¹ Nehru was shocked. He felt humili-

¹ He got 1306 votes against 1092 for Kripalani.

liated. Vallabhbhai chuckled with satisfaction. Elated Vallabhbhaites sauntered about the lobbies like flamboyant peacocks, making a brazen show of their triumph. They even threatened to topple Nehru.

Soon after Vallabhbhai's death, Nehru took the first drastic step to dislodge Tandon. With Vallabhbhai gone, many changed loyalties. Nehru found new supporters in the Working Committee and the All India Congress Committee. To force the issue he resigned from the Working Committee. This was an indirect way to show lack of confidence in the President. Several other members followed. Tandon soon realized that he could not function any more as President. He resigned. In order not to take any chances and to establish his undisputed authority within the party, Nehru decided to become Congress President himself.² Within a month of succeeding Tandon, Nehru ordered that arrangements be made for holding a special session of the Congress. It was to be the first session in the capital after India's independence. It was also to be a sort of Coronation.

A Reception Committee was set to work. I was elected Vice-President of the Committee. The site for the session was chosen by Nehru. We were allotted unlimited space on the area where Chanakyapuri was later to be built. Official agencies and big-business cooperated with us in lightening our task. A magnificent tent city sprang up overnight, where delegates from all over India were to be lodged. A mammoth pandal was constructed. As Nehru had suggested, one wing was reserved for foreign dignitaries and diplomats. It was filled up with comfortable chairs. Another wing was reserved for rich donors. The rest of the space was duly carpeted to provide squatting space in traditional Congress style. A seven-foot high platform was raised to seat members of the Working Committee. In size alone the platform looked like the mammoth stage of an open

² At one stage, due to difficulties with Patel, Nehru had been seriously contemplating retirement from the Congress, and from the Prime Ministership. But after being elected Congress President he felt retirement was out of the question.

air theatre. The rostrum offered another ten feet of height to the speaker. To give the platform a theatrical touch, the "architect"³ had designed a hessian-framed, colourful rear, wherein instead of a green room, were located a private room for the President, a Committee room for consultations, a canteen, etc. From the roof ran white massive rolls of lent khadi creating the illusion of curtain drops. Khadi panels with murals done by leading artists made up the wings. A Moghul-style facade ran all along the front of the dias with hidden lights creating an eerie effect. On the well-carpetted platform were arranged massive Moghul-style pillows to serve as back rests.

As the dream city of gray and white khadi was undergoing its last touches, Nehru arrived for a final inspection. The spectacle pleased him. He walked up to the rostrum to survey the massive *pandal*, adorned with bunting, streamers, and stencilled slogans: quotes from the sayings of Gandhi and himself. "This is splendid," he said. The words had hardly been uttered when we heard the sound of loud explosions. In the twinkling of an eye flames rose from one of the back-stage rooms. Forgetting that he was Congress President and Prime Minister, Nehru rushed towards the room in which the flames had almost become a blaze. By a mysterious effort I pushed him backwards. Before he knew what had happened, two security men had forcibly captured the "Prime Minister" and taken him away. We feared that some time-bombs may have exploded. Actually a fuse box had burnt, causing a short-circuit. Within a quarter of an hour, before any fire engine could arrive, the *pandal* was reduced to cinders. With great difficulty, we could save a major part of the neighbouring tent city.

As soon as we could, I and a few others rushed to the Prime Minister's house to report what had happened and to find out if Nehru was safe. The Prime Minister was missing. Instead of returning to the house the Prime Minister had first sent urgent calls for fire engines and police help. He then saw a large number of cars parked unattended behind the *pandal*. Seeing the danger of flames spreading to the cars, with the

³ Mr G. C. Sharma.

help of his security men and a few others, he pushed each one of them one by one, till they were beyond danger. Behind the *pandal* were also a few workers' huts. He helped the occupants to remove their belongings and to set up galvanised sheets between their huts and the advancing flames. "You should not have done this, sir. It was taking a great risk," remarked one of my companions. Nehru smiled. His face and hands were still covered with soot. "Frankly, I forgot I was Prime Minister. I felt for once I was a boy-scout again. I hope I did a good job."

The Congress was to meet the next day. We met later at the Prime Minister's House to confer with the "Congress President", whether the session should be postponed or held in some other improvised place. Nehru sat silent for a time. Then suddenly, as if waking out of a dream, he said, "Let everything be as it is. We will never again hold a Congress session among the ashes of a grand *pandal*.⁴ Let us all work tonight to make the arrangements for tomorrow.

It was early morning before he and all of us left. At the appointed time, he, the Congress President, was received with due ceremony, and in the manner in which he had rehearsed a day earlier. He was taken in procession to the *pandal*, and then to the platform, amidst the odour of charred wood and burnt cloth, and the deafening applause of fifty thousand people. He had been Congress President half a dozen times before. This was the first time Jawaharlal himself placed the "crown of thorns" on Nehru's head! "

Writing about himself in 1936, under a nom-de-plume, Jawaharlal had expressed the fear that Nehru the popular hero, the pampered, favoured child of destiny, might be heading for "dictatorship": a tendency which needed to be resisted. Circumstances had now conspired to actually make him dictator, and there was no resisting him. He was Congress President, Prime Minister and the idol of millions!

Gandhi had advised the dissolution of the Congress after

⁴ The incident was repeated in 1969 when the Congress Pandal at Faridabad was reduced to ashes, and the session was held among charred remains.

1947. His most ardent and trusted followers had grown out of some able students who had given up their studies a quarter of a century ago, or from lawyers who had given up their legal practice at the same time. Periodic or repeated jail-going, sacrifices and sufferings in the struggle, may have added to their popularity, but were not calculated to have added, in all cases, to their eligibility or ability for Ministerial office. A good soldier, Gandhi felt, did not always make a competent administrator. He feared that, with Congress in power, a jail ticket might become a passport to high office. The position now became worse, when many who only had a "party ticket" edged for positions of power and influence.

If the Congress had been dissolved after Independence, it is most likely that Nehru would have emerged as leader of one party and Vallabhbhai of the other. The emergence of two such parties not so widely divided in political and economic outlook would have been a healthy development for the country, and for democracy. If, again, Vallabhbhai had died before Gandhi, Nehru would not have felt a continual sense of insecurity within the party. While Vallabhbhai was alive, he could not kick back at the party. After Vallabhbhai's death, the sense of insecurity continued. Safe, loyal men were difficult to find. To remove the element of insecurity he tried to win over key party-men who had reached positions of power under Vallabhbhai, even though they did not share his political convictions. He became Gandhi; Vallabhbhai and Nehru rolled into one. He gathered around him a widening circle of party-men. Cambridge associates, and kinsmen from the Kashmiri clan. But among them he had very few confidants. There was in fact no one, except perhaps his daughter in later years, in whom he confided unreservedly.

A born exhibitionist, an actor who could simulate the pose best suited to a circumstance, the real Nehru now lived in a chrysalis of his mental creation, insulated against the consequences of his actions, feeding his ego on seeming triumphs, blaming others for set-backs and failures—feeling all the time a sense of superiority and insecurity which both increased with

the diminishing IQ of the associates around him. There were now times when Nehru spoke to you, and the real Nehru passed you by. There were other times when Nehru over-powered you with an intense emotional impact, like a depth charge from a highpowered dynamo, without even saying a word. He became a man of shocks and surprises; a man of paradoxes and contradictions. He became a man with highly strung nerves, and a will of iron; a volatile, excitable temperament and yet capable of utmost patience; a bundle of indecisions, and a man of intense action; a thinker of extraordinary depth and clarity, but invoking intuition to dictate big decisions; a man of long silences, and at the same time a voluble speaker whose resistance broke down in front of the mike.

Nehru was intensely human. He liked good food, flowers, works of art, music, plays, books, beauty in general, and attractive women. In food he was like his father an epicure and not a gourmet. Of flowers he wanted the best, but never had a gardener's enthusiasm. He liked seeing well-produced plays, scanning select books, listening to choice music, but only when he had spare time. Of these he preferred to be more of a patron than a connoisseur. Handsome physically, he could cast a spell as a conversationalist on anyone he met. Where women were concerned, these two qualities, combined with a certain amount of emotional intensity, made him irresistible. He won the hearts of many, but offered his serious loyalty to a very few. Even among these few there was no one whom he permitted to come permanently between him and his life's mission. This only emphasised his sense of loneliness. In doing so he had to deny to himself the emotional impulses he valued most, not because like Gandhi he considered them taboo, but because beyond a certain measure he valued his mission and purpose more.

If he could not clearly define the Socialism of his concept, it was because he himself was feudal in his approach to life, and socialistic only in his approach to political problems; India itself was a country to which no dogmas or theories propounded by those alien to its problems could apply. The answer to its

national allergies, individual idiosyncrasies and social and economic inequalities could not be provided either by Engels, Proudhon, Lenin or Karl Marx. Even Gandhi failed to give a complete answer. It is not surprising that Nehru should now on have felt bewildered, even though the country gave him the green signal to evolve for it a pattern of society he deemed most suitable.

37

A Classless Society

He was wearing a saffron-dyed mini-dhoti, under a white, badly-tailored mini-shirt. He escorted me to a little room. This served as bed-sitting-dining room in his double-storied, twenty-roomed mansion. His wooden slippers, with their centre knob held between the big toe and the second toe, sounded "klip-a-klap". "Sit down," he said, "pointing to a rush chair. He himself squatted on a wooden Diwan, with saffron-dyed covers on its mattress and cushions. "Lallaji",¹ as he was familiarly known, was then one of the few multi-millionaires in Delhi.

The Banyas of earlier days started life, with borrowed money, in a rented place, and out of nothing built fabulous fortunes. A big house was a prestige symbol. The Banyas ate sparingly, dressed in slovenly simplicity, and worked hard from sunrise till late after sunset. "Lallaji" was no exception. Even then his display of saffron-dyed simplicity seemed to me unusual. I asked if this was a "stunt" or a prelude to his becoming a *Sadhu*. "No," said Lallaji, "I have no desire to become a *Sadhu*. I am practising Socialism. In this I am more inclined to agree with Gandhi than Nehru. I have reduced my personal wants. I spend on myself no more than does one of my mill workers. I hope to use a greater part of my wealth as a trust, in the service of my fellow citizens."

The saffron phase did not last long. Lallaji soon returned to normal life. He did donate a large part of his immense fortune to good causes. Like many other idealistic preachings of

¹ Sir Shri Ram.

the Mahatma, the Gandhian concept of Socialism died with Gandhi.

Though Nehru believed as sincerely as Gandhi in diminishing the disparities of wealth, "class", and "caste", he made considerable allowance for pomp and ostentation in the name of party and State. Nehru himself dressed elegantly. In the twelve-acre Prime Minister's Estate, he surrounded himself with all that good taste and feudal comfort could command. But what came naturally to Nehru carried an element of *nov-riche* vulgarity where many of his colleagues were concerned. They began to look upon themselves as the privileged and the "chosen ones" and considered public funds as a private preserve, expendable at their discretion even to meet their private requirements.² Palatial buildings were either acquired or built for ministers, or to serve as exclusive guest-houses for officials and party bosses.³ Taxpayer-subsidised amenities gave to the new class the same illusion as my friend Lallaji had created for himself of spending no more than one of his mill workers on personal wants.⁴

To reduce the accumulation of wealth in private hands, and to accelerate the process of rapid industrialization, a large number of essential industries involving hundreds of crores of investment were started by the state. These represented the "public sector". In setting up Railways, establishing the tele-

² Dijlas (of Yugoslavia) in his book *The New Class* writes : "By various methods such as nationalization, compulsory co-operation, high taxes and price irregularities, private ownership was destroyed... country homes, the best housing furniture and similar things were acquired, special quarters and exclusive rest-houses were established for the elite of the new Class.". P. 57.

³ A well-furnished, double bedroom in these palatial establishments cost Rs 5/- per day. Similar hotel accommodation cost a private individual more than ten times. The rates for three square meals and two teas were at places Rs 10 - to Rs 15/- per day. In Cochin, in the aristocratic state guest-house overlooking the sea, for a suite consisting of a very large sitting room, an office, a colossal bedroom with separate dressing rooms and bathrooms the charges were Rs 40/- for two including excellent meals.

⁴ According to estimates made by critical members in the Lok Sabha, a Minister's emoluments, inclusive of tax-free perquisites, came to over three lakh rupees a year.

graph and the telephone systems, putting up ordinance factories, or controlling mines, the purpose the British had was to control public utilities for effective administration. This was state ownership. The new state now started acquiring control of aviation, life insurance, banks, natural oil resources, dry docks, ship yards, radio, television, milk supply, transport and a score of big and small industries. In no country in the world had a democratic Government acquired in such a short time control of such vast industrial, commercial and public utility enterprises and financial resources as the Congress Government did in the two decades of independence. Although rightly impatient to set up and enlarge the public sector, the Congress did not have in the party, or in the Government, competent technocrats or men of administrative experience or ability to manage these colossal undertakings involving billions. What was designed to promote economic expansion, in actual practice resulted in a most inefficient, and a thoroughly amateurish and gravely mismanaged, bureaucratically run form of state capitalism.⁵

As a further step towards socialisation a whole range of throttling controls were introduced at various levels so that, except the tempers of the opposition and the amenities of the ministers, very little remained uncontrolled.⁶ While some control may have been necessary, the administration of controls was, not just faulty, but profoundly annoying. Few at the top realized what these controls meant to the common citizen in waste of time, physical discomfort, humiliation and frustration.

⁵ Dijlas in his book *The New Class* writes: "It is the bureaucracy which finally uses, administers, and controls both nationalized and socialized property, as well as the entire life of society." This process of extended state control or nationalization, he writes, has "the origin of a new form of ownership, of a new ruling class". According to Dijlas the new class cannot assume its oligarchic power unless it endeavours to eliminate other classes. Hence the cry for a "Classless Society".

⁶ Licensed imports controlled practically every industry in the country. Then there was control on cement and bricks, control on kerosene and spirit, control on cereals and sugar, control on fuel and chemicals, control on water supply and electricity, control on foreign travel, on gold and—the least successful of all—birth control.

A man or his wife had to wait mornings in queue for a doubtful half pint of milk. They had then to line up for a kilogram of coal. Once a week, for the weekly ration. The common man had to queue at bus stops, at railway stations, before clerks to obtain ration cards for sugar, cereals and kerosine, outside hospitals to obtain medical attendance, at postal windows to deposit money or to get a stamp.

In order to meet a soaring bill of expenditure, on losing enterprises and an expanding army of employees, the Government resorted to a policy of taxation which, in terms of its variety and incidence, had no parallel in any country in the world. Two men stand out conspicuously whom Nehru handpicked to implement the socialistic commitments of the Congress party. T. T. Krishnamachari was an astute Brahmin hailing from Madras. He started life as a sales agent for a British set-up in Bombay. He resigned to join politics. He became a member of the Legislative Assembly. In later years he joined the Congress party. Morarji Desai hailed from Ahmedabad. He had served as an executive in the British administration, but resigned in response to Gandhi's appeal to public servants to withdraw their cooperation from the British. Morarji Desai shared only one thing with Nehru. They belonged to the same party. He considered Gandhi his spiritual guide, and Vallabhbhai Patel his political guru. Starting as a Minister in the Bombay Cabinet, he rose to be the Chief Minister. Like Vallabhbhai he was strong, efficient, and obstinate. Like Vallabhbhai he was neither a leftist nor a rightist.

Only in one matter did Morarji Desai discard realism and slip into the morass of Idealism. Being a tee-totaler himself, he felt that, as a devotee of Gandhi, the one great reform he could introduce in Bombay by legislation was "prohibition". It was one of the most daring social legislations introduced by any state government in the world after the expensive failure of the experiment in the United States. It meant a loss of crores in revenue and an expenditure of several crores in enforcement machinery. Open drinking diminished considerably. But social and moral evils, crime and corruption resulting

from prohibition obscured totally the moral gains. Prohibition made crime profitable. The smuggler, the illicit brewer, the bottlegger, colluding with customs, excise and police officials, set up an expanding underworld of crime and corruption. Even those who never thought of a drink joined in the clandestine thrill of visiting improvised bars and "speak-easies" in which the city of Bombay suddenly began to abound. With "speak-easies" and illicit bars came the depravities of unregulated night life. It was freely said that the only liquor shop open to non-permit holders day and night was a well-known police station in the crime area. The best illicit brew came from the prisons where bootleggers were detained.

T. T. Krishnamachari originally joined the Government as Minister for Commerce. Deshmukh, his predecessor, was for giving the highest priority to capital goods. T.T.K. was liberal towards toothbrushes, cosmetics, other consumer requirements, including even foreign sweets and chocolates. Deshmukh believed that taxation should be like feathering a goose: "maximum feathers without hurting"! T.T.K. was neither a Socialist nor a financial expert. He had the flexible mind of a politician. When Deshmukh resigned, Nehru wanted someone with a Socialist bias. Dr Kalder, a leftist economist, had visited India and impressed Nehru with his unconventional ideas on taxation. T.T.K. not only started "talking Socialism" but was one of the few who began advocating that a Socialistic pattern was possible through taxation on the lines suggested by Dr Kalder. Thus T.T.K. was moved from "Commerce" to "Finance". Besides other direct and indirect taxes, he introduced the Expenditure Tax. This enthused Nehru and bewildered the economists.

Morarji was invited to join the Central Cabinet. He came with high hopes of becoming either the Home Minister or Minister for Defence with a claim to Deputy Prime Ministership. In appointing him to a stop-gap vacancy⁷ created by T.T.K., Nehru did not encourage such a hope. The unpredictable however happened. After a few years T.T.K. came under

⁷ Commerce Minister.

a cloud and resigned.⁸ Nehru did not expect this to happen. He felt bewildered why "Calpurnia" did not keep herself "above suspicion". Nehru now wanted someone to restore national confidence in the soundness of the Government's economic policies. Morarji was the only one with party influence and popular prestige. Even though Morarji did not share the economic theories of T.T.K. and had no bias for Kalder, Morarji was appointed Finance Minister. Morarji abolished the Expenditure Tax and introduced a scheme of annuity deposits to induce savings. While his financial experiments were still in the raw, Morarji lost his seat in the Lok Sabha in the elections. Meanwhile T.T.K. made a last-minute photo-finish bid to get re-elected unopposed. He was again put in charge of Finance. T.T.K. reimposed the Expenditure Tax.⁹ He pronounced the Compulsory Deposit Scheme as misconceived and amateurish. Instead he introduced the Annuity Deposit Plan. Thus through a complex, confusing, unstable and amateurish process of trial and error, these short-term Ministers developed a financial chaos which led to heavy deficit financing, a lot of avoidable waste, and a blocking of national economy.

In determining sartorial conventions and living standards, the leaders found themselves between Socialistic pulls on the one hand and the need to keep up with the standards of the diplomatic corp on the other. Most diplomats lived in a state of princely pomp and splendour out of reach even to their own ministers at home. The "V.I.P." now represented a new class. If you were not a V.I.P. you were a nobody. The V.I.P. group included diplomats, Ministers and other political big-wigs. They all used chauffeur-driven limousines, employed a battery of chaprasis, and lived in stately mansions. Thus the new Classless Society came to represent a rare motley of contrasting colours: The tattered loin-cloth, the feudal *achkan*, the tartan bushshirt, the babu's tunic, the blue decoran suit,

⁸ The financial transactions of one Mundra, a business adventurer, involving lakhs in L.I.C. investments and the Finance Ministry, led to a major scandal and a public inquiry. The inquiry left some black spots on T.T.K.'s escutcheon.

⁹ Only to abolish it within a year.

the custom-built cadillac, the stately mansions, the *jhuggies* and the *jhompries*. All these represented a rare weave of permissive economic co-existence. They constituted a feudal format for the new "Socialist" pattern, intended to obliterate distinctions between the affluent and the poor.

38

Of Mice and Rice

"We could send you plenty of mice, your Excellency. In fact, any amount, free. India need only pay freight charges," said the Ambassador of Argentina¹ to the then President of India, Rajendra Prasad, a former Minister for Food. The Ambassador was an affable, well-meaning, generous individual. The President, though seemingly shocked, maintained an air of politeness and with a chuckle suggested I take the Ambassador to K. M. Munshi who was then the Minister for Food. Munshi was standing at a little distance among other guests attending the President's party.

K. M. Munshi had been an outstanding lawyer, an author and a brilliant playwright. He was an astute politician. He had been off and on in and out of the Congress during the last twenty years. He was short, lean and vibrant. He was unduly conscious of his capacity to think and decide quickly for everyone else. He had an "I-know-all" ego, and felt that whether it was food, a constitution, or a rabbit, he just had to wave a hand and, "presto", it would be there. Within a short time of his taking charge of the food ministry, he had made two original contributions towards "improving" the food situation. He and Mrs Munshi, both competitors in slimming and fad-dists in food habits, had created a non-cereal diet to make common people "change their food habits". Mrs Munshi succeeded in creating a variety of substitutes for rice and wheat out of jack fruit, raw bananas, sweet potatoes, lentils, tapiocca,

¹ 1950.

lotus roots, etc. Although cereals were in short supply, the substitutes were much more expensive.

Munshi's second "outstanding" contribution was the discovery that ever since the Vedic period, on a special day before the commencement of the monsoon, trees were planted all over India. The festival was called *Van Mahotsav*. Behind this great ritual, he explained, was a scientific concept, namely, "more trees, more undersoil water and more vapour-condensing areas in the country, resulting in plentiful rains". That year, on *Van Mahotsav* day, everyone of any importance in the country, from the Prime Minister downwards, took time off, to plant solemnly and ceremonially, thousands of little saplings in different cities. The ceremony helped to satisfy the ego of many high and low dignitaries, offering them the hope that while they may be forgotten, there would still be a tree or two associated with their names. To the people this exercise in pit-digging generated the vision that every tree meant more rain and more food for the hungry. Very few of the saplings survived beyond a week.

As a "vegetarian", Munshi felt manifestly offended when the Ambassador made his offer. He had heard that in China certain types of "lice" were a delicacy and a special species of rodents was staple food. "It is very kind of your Excellency, but our people do not eat mice," he said curtly. "It is high time they did," protested the Ambassador. "Some people in our Embassy could help in teaching them how to cook. There are sixteen-odd ways of cooking mice. We prepare loaves. In Mexico they even make tortias. Guess you call them 'chupattees'." Munshi soon discovered that the Ambassador's country had a large surplus of maize, and the confusion lay in the way the word was being pronounced by him.

We invited Babu Rajendra Prasad to inaugurate a non-cereal food exhibition. When arrangements were being made for the exhibition, the Ambassador offered to help in introducing a few non-cereal dishes of his country. Ladies from his Embassy prepared almost a dozen excellent dishes. Apart from the regular *tortia* (*chapatti*), pop-corn, corn on cob, corn soup, etc., there

were mincemeat corn bread, meat-stuffed corn loaf, hot dogs in corn rolls, etc. I was delighted. Mrs Munshi was shocked. "But, Madam, you must taste the dishes. They are very nice. They have no wheat, no rice," urged the Ambassador. "We want only vegetarian dishes for the exhibition, Your Excellency," protested Mrs Munshi.

The Ambassador could not easily associate such an orthodox outlook with her bobbed hair. "But, Madam, your country has enough meat. Look at the large number of useless cattle in the streets and on the roads. I have seen some good hogs in the villages going to Agra and Jaipur. Then you have plentiful birds. They only eat away your grain. I do not know what monkeys taste like. But you have these in thousands. Besides, a large number of your people are meat-eaters. It is not merely cereals that you can use, but a lot of your own local meat. Your country may be short of rice, or a little of wheat, but otherwise you have a lot of food for your people, if they are told how to use these plentiful natural resources. Look at your seashores, lakes and ponds. What fish, Madam!" he added persuasively. "With the way your population is growing, if the people are not made to feed on any and every nourishing thing they can get, the time will soon come when all the surplus rice and wheat of the world will not help to meet India's needs."

Mrs Munshi did not like this homily and suggested in Hindustani that I explain why we had to exclude meat dishes from the exhibition. Frankly, I could offer no convincing explanation, except that the Munshis were vegetarians. Besides, the introduction of meat at the exhibition could lead to needless controversies. A large part of the population, it was true, were non-vegetarian. But the Hindus, I explained, abjured beef, and the Muslims pork. Both had religious taboos concerning the methods of killing. Nonetheless, I was inclined to agree fully with his rational approach.

In 1949, basing his views on the doubtful data supplied by the Food Department, Nehru estimated² the food deficit to be

² Speech at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, March 4, 1949.

seven to eight per cent. "It should be easily possible . . .," he said, "in the course of the next two years or so . . . , by bringing fresh areas under cultivation, or by a change of food habits, to fill this deficit of seven to eight per cent." In this mood of illusory optimism, Nehru declared, "I think of not getting any food from abroad after a certain period—let us put it two years. I should not add a day more, and we must make up our minds that we shall all live on the food that we produce after two years or die in the attempt." Three years later, Dr Lanka Sundaram, M.P., reminded the Prime Minister of this pledge. Nehru apologised and said, "I regret, however, that my words have been falsified. I feel thoroughly ashamed that what was almost a pledge to the country has been broken." He however still maintained that by the end of the first plan they would have put "an end to them (food imports)" and "we may be eventually exporting some of our surplus food."³

In 1949 I was in New York. I was requested to be present at a ceremony arranged by Press Correspondents at the United Nations who had collected special funds to send a few tons of wheat to India. It represented a great sacrifice on their part. It was also for them a tremendous humanitarian gesture. In 1951 I was at Adelaide (Australia) where I was invited to participate in a similar ceremony. The Rotary Club of Adelaide had collected funds to send a few tons of wheat to India. I was even asked

³ At the time of the first National Food Conference called by Rajendra Prasad, then Minister for Food, in a memorable address Gandhi warned against India turning a beggar, and insisted that by enlisting the cooperation of the people, the problem could be solved. His views were not heeded. "We must reclaim all waste land which is capable of being placed under immediate cultivation," he had said. "If every farmer were to realize the necessity of growing food wherever food could be grown, we should most probably forget that there was scarcity of foodstuffs in the land." (Seindulkar, op. cit., Vol. VIII).

Gandhi wanted rationing and other controls to be lifted, and distribution of food stuffs left to normal local agencies. "Centralization of the food stuffs, I apprehend, is ruinous. Decentralization easily deals a blow to black-marketing and will save the country millions." He called for "self help and self reliance" and warned against "dependence on foreign countries" which would ultimately lead to "bankruptcy". In any case, Gandhi said, "we must not go abegging. It demoralizes".

to make a speech. I felt overwhelmed by the generosity of these men and women. I said so. But in my heart, on both these occasions and on many other occasions, like any other Indian, when I had to acknowledge acts of similar generosity I felt more shame than gratitude. As time passed, Indian politicians on the other hand almost felt as if this charity on the part of the donors was an obligation, and for India to receive it was a matter of right. Every new Food Minister blusteringly promised that he intended tackling the food problem on a "war footing". But one after the other they all failed. The average life of a Food Minister did not go beyond two years.

Rationing of wheat and rice was first introduced by the British during the war. Sir J. P. Srivastava was the Minister for Food. "J. P." was an astute politician, a clever businessman and generally a very happy-go-lucky individual. I asked him once if he seriously believed that the very expensive machinery of rationing which covered only a fraction of the country was effective or necessary? "Yes and no," he said. "Nobody knows how much shortage of food there is in the country. Maybe there is even a surplus." "But how can rationing for say twenty million people only in large cities take care of the food needs of a total four hundred million inhabitants?" I asked. "Isn't that funny?" he said. "I have often asked that question myself. But your Congress friends take it for granted. It is clear that the Government trusts the other four hundred millions to take care of themselves." Sir J. P. had a delightful sense of humour, and an extraordinary way of laughing. He narrowed his shoulders, broadened his all too broad lower lip, closed his bleary eyes and with a little sprint burst into loud laughter before he said what he considered humorous. "There has been rationing in U.K. since the war started. Some Congress politicians complained that if we had followed Britain's example earlier, the Bengal famine could have been prevented. Rationing now gives them the illusion that by adopting the British system, food supplies to the people have been assured! Aren't they infantile?"

Rafi Ahmed Kidwai was neither learned nor brilliant. But he was a great realist. Kidwai took quick decisions, sometimes acted intuitively and had a way of making things move. In 1953 Rafi took up the Food portfolio. Before officially taking charge, Rafi mysteriously disappeared. Very few even among his intimates knew about his "hide-out". I was to be one of those few.⁴ Among other things, I asked what he was doing watching races and the Indian Ocean when he should be sitting in the Secretariat solving the food problem. "Do you think I am wasting time?" retorted Rafi. "I have driven out to villages and small towns. I do not want to meet secretaries and politicians for some time. I want to meet common people, peasants, labourers, petty traders. I would even like to meet wholesalers, black-marketeers, importers, etc. etc. But not as the Food Minister."

Rafi spent a few weeks away from Delhi changing from one hide-out to the other. Soon after taking official charge, he decided to end rationing. He closed down all rationing offices and depots. For the first time after years, India had free trading in grains and cereals. His colleagues were first shocked at the grave risks involved in such an unconventional decision. The planners produced carefully assembled data to prove the dangers involved. But their fears were belied by experience. In the few years that followed, food production went up in the country. Foreign imports diminished from year to year; prices kept fairly within the representative index for other essentials. Millions were saved by closing the Rationing Department. The peasants felt happy. The traders were more than enthusiastic. The people in the former rationed areas breathed a sigh of utmost relief. For once they were saved the torture and the humiliation of queueing to obtain a handful of grain or rice. When Rafi died, free trading in cereals died with him.

⁴I accidentally met him during one of his unusual visits to the race course in Bombay and then started visiting him in his seashore shack on the Juhu Beach, where he was relaxing.

39

A Planners' Paradise

Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda, lawyer by profession, Trade Unionist by adoption, and a socialist by belief, was one of the most honest politicians around Nehru. Before joining the Cabinet he had distinguished himself as a labour leader in Ahmedabad. When I knew him first, he was a two-garment politician, simple in habits, simple in dress, and simple in his normal way of living. When he joined as Labour Minister in the Nehru Cabinet, he added a "Jawahar vest" to his garments for informal occasions, and an indifferently tailored long coat buttoned to the neck as formal attire. His unevenly drooping growth on the upper lip was another one of his distinguishing trade marks. This was trimmed to accord with the dignities of office.

Except that they both shared a flare for Socialism, Nehru and Nandaji had very little in common. In fact, there were many things about Nandaji which Nehru thoroughly disliked. Nehru could not suffer Sadhus. Nandaji had a deep regard for all kinds of Sadhus and Yogis. He had his own private astrologer who regulated his movements and actions in accord with the directives of the planets. Where his advice conflicted with that of the officials, Nandaji was more inclined to be guided by the astrologer. He was a faddist in diet. He carried his own meals, if he could not take his private cook with him. When a Member of Parliament referred to the danger of a "hot case" with live coals being carried by a Minister during air trips, the Prime Minister felt seriously embarrassed.¹

¹One of the aides in the Indian High Commissioner's office in London

Nandaji approached every subject in a circle rather than in a straight line. He employed a hundred words where ten would be too many. He enjoyed repeating himself for the pleasure of listening to his own voice. With all that, his integrity, his patriotism and his sincere dedication to the cause of service to the common man were never in doubt. It was these three qualities, so very rare among those around Nehru at the time, that persuaded him to ignore the fads and spiritual vagaries of Nandaji. He began associating him closer and closer with the administration. In addition to his ministerial duties, Nandaji soon found himself directing the operations of the Planning Commission.

Nehru had a Marxist's faith in planning. While his sense of individualism revolted against the iron control of the Politburo in Russia, he was highly impressed by the successive Five Year Plans of the Soviet Government. Soon after Independence, Nehru formally set up a Planning Commission to draw up the first Five Year Plan. Its members were men of outstanding ability with a vast experience of administration. They were free from political or ideological "isms", and bereft of any doctrinaire inhibitions or obsessions.² The Commission produced an unambitious, realistic First Plan which soon put the country on the road to economic recovery. In many directions the targets of the Plan were exceeded.

Soon, however, the Planning Commission underwent rapid

told me about a Minister for whom reservations^{*} had been made at Claridge's. "I would prefer to have my own simple diet," the Minister had said. "If you could just get me the 'cook' for a few minutes, I could give him the ingredients and tell him what to do." The aide felt it was easier to approach his own High Commissioner than to summon the Chef.

² Deshmukh, the Vice-Chairman, was one of the finest financial brains to have ever joined the Nehru Cabinet. V. T. Krishnamachari (75) was the grand builder of Baroda. He had also been the Prime Minister of Jaipur. Chandu Trivedi (69) was one of the most brilliant and outstanding members of the Indian Civil Service with a versatile experience in several jobs of great responsibility. K. C. Neogy (68) had been a member of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly for more than two decades. He had been a constructive critic of the administration and a keen student of politics.

changes. With the Second and Third Plan, the Planning Commission gained more and more in prestige and size. From a small, compact body, it grew into a large administrative machine, with an expensive and expanding Secretariat representing in itself a microcosm of all Central and State departments.³

Since Nehru was the head of the Planning Commission, membership of the Commission became attractive, and in the case of many aspirants, a stepping stone to ambassadorial, ministerial and other important positions. Economists who before Independence had advocated an economy oriented to production through private enterprise and *laissez faire* began finding extraordinary virtues in controls, high taxation, state ownership and indeterminate socialist patterns. Some of them even discarded their western garments in favour of *khadi*, in the hope that this physical faith in the handloom might further convince the Prime Minister of their altered beliefs. Thus in due course the pattern of membership changed. Practical-minded, experienced and realistic veterans were slowly replaced by inexperienced, "Socialism"-oriented, theoretical men, capable of preparing ambitious blue prints, but incapable perhaps of successfully running a barber shop.

By the time of the Second Plan, the Government had overcome inhibitions about carrying the beggar's bowl for "aid". The success of the First Plan, the prestige of Nehru as the unaligned peace-maker, and the size, capacity and importance of India in South Asia as a great democracy, all contributed to build up a "Help India" psychology in different countries of the world. Aid and loans started pouring in from many quarters.

Not satisfied with the many millions that foreigners offered in loans and charity, the planners wanted the Government to mop up all that could be obtained through every conceivable method of taxation. Thus in the ten years of the Second and Third Plan, India spent the normal revenues of fifty years. The interest on the loans alone was more than a few years' revenue.

³The Planning Commission shifted to its own six-storeyed airconditioned building: *Yojana Bhavan*.

The have-nots soon began to shout, "The rich have become richer, the poor have become poorer!" The rich complained, "Too much money has been pumped into the economy. The taxes are too heavy to permit any incentive. The rupee has lost its purchasing power. The dog is eating its tail!" Students clamoured, "We have graduation diplomas but no jobs!" The wage earners protested, "We have jobs at three times the old wages. But prices are six times higher!" The salaried classes felt squeezed in between slow-rising incomes and sky-rocketing prices. One section demanded, "Remove controls as these create black money, corrupt officials and shortages!" Another section shouted, "Confiscate black money, freeze profits, nationalize as many trades and industries as possible!" The voice of discontent and distress became louder and more confused!

The planners were a mixed lot: Good, bad and indifferent. Those with experience lived too much in the past to be able to project their minds into the future. Those who had read all the theories were mostly lacking in experience. Hardly any of the whole-time incumbents stayed long enough to face the results of their planning, to test where they had done well or where they had blundered. The average life of a planning member was less than two years. The plan span was fixed at five. When the Third Plan hit the marshes, and the Fourth Plan was stymied for lack of funds, the Planning Commission had lost all its members. One by one they left for better jobs or pastures new.

“Maulana” Teaches Milton

I sat looking at the saphire-blue waters of the Nainital Lake, one of the most picturesque small lakes in the world. I was reading P. G. Wodehouse. I had time hanging on my hands. Exactly within half an hour I and a couple of other press representatives were to be handed printed lists in which would be recorded the fate of more than twenty thousand boys and girls distributed all over the United Provinces. For years the papers had published the results on being received by post in the ordinary course. I was determined this year to be the first to publish the list and had come personally only for this purpose. I had already met the telegraph supervisor and the two-morse men under him and had been assured fullest cooperation. As I was looking across at the lake between intervals of reading Wodehouse, I had a brain wave. There was still half an hour before the Registrar was to hand over the results to us. I walked over to the telegraph office. Supposing I gave him part of the chapter from P. G. Wodehouse I had read, to telegraph to my paper, what time would it take to clear? The amused chief made a careful calculation and said, two days, if important government messages do not intervene. “Good,” I said, smiling. I tore the pages, pasted them on the forms, signed my name and handed over the “message”. “You are not serious, Sir?” asked the supervisor. “I am.” “But it will cost a lot of money even at Press Rates,” he warned. “I know.” I wished I could tell him that the gamble I was taking opened up fresh prospects of my beating my rivals by a scoop, and selling my paper to

the thousands of young hopefuls hours before others. The trick worked!

In no country in the world could one imagine editors trying to scoop each other on examination results! Nowhere in the world have school and university examinations meant so much to so many in determining their future life and in influencing the family economy of their parents. I have often remembered the words of Marshall Pibul Songram, who was dictator of Thailand when I visited that country in the 'fifties. Thailand had an agricultural college, euphemistically referred to as the Agricultural University, a teachers' seminary called a Teachers' University and a few other higher educational institutions all with impressive names. The chief source of education was a large number of minor schools attached to monasteries. Eighty per cent of the people were "literate", but education except for a few thousand stopped at the elementary stage. "Education is good," mused the earthy Pibul. "But education can be harmful. Too much of it can be a curse. Everyone does not have the same brain. But everyone who has the same diploma thinks so. So the more diplomas you distribute, the more fools you have on your hands. Then you go about creating new jobs for them. But this does not reduce the number of fools! In Thailand, we have literacy, but not too much education. The people are happy. They can read and write, but they will do any job, in the city or on the farm."

In India, the picture was just the opposite. Men and women—whole families—starved to provide boys and girls with "education", to procure some kind of diploma or degree. The system of education the British had left was primarily aimed at producing administrative subordinates, executive underlings and clerks.

Of all the people around him, Nehru selected Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as the first Minister of Education. He remained in charge of education till he died in 1959. Abul Kalam was born in Mecca.¹ His father, a great Arabic scholar, looked after his education in early years. "My father was a man who

¹ 1888.

believed in the old ways of life,"² writes Azad. "He had no faith in western education, and never thought of giving me an education of the modern type." At sixteen he learnt the English Alphabet from his tutor. Azad, Ansari and myself were in prison together for a short period in the early thirties. Azad thought Ansari a politician without any religious base. "He is a *Mulla* first and a *Mulla* last," said Ansari of Azad. "He sits in Delhi and dreams of Mecca." The Maulana had developed a good grasp of fundamentals in politics and economics. But internationally the epicentre of his thinking lay in the middle-east. He might have distinguished as Chancellor of an institution for theological research and Islamic studies like Al Hazar, but as a Minister of Education he was definitely a square peg in a very round hole. Unfortunately for him, Milton did not compose poetry in Arabic. It was impossible for anyone to convince Nehru of this apparent fact. "You do not need to possess a diploma or a degree to become a Minister," Nehru often pleaded on behalf of the Maulana and his other "self-educated" colleagues.

Quantitatively, during Azad's twelve years of Ministership, the progress made by India in the field of education was colossal. Qualitatively the system remained practically the same as in 1947. His slogan was "more education" but not "better education". From 60 crores in 1947, State expenditure on education rose to six hundred crores. Fifty million children were enrolled in elementary schools. Eight out of every eleven children under eleven years were attending school. The number of students rose from three million to eighteen million. These astronomical figures, quantitatively, represented a staggering achievement. Assessed qualitatively, they represented a monumental failure. "The destiny of India," wrote the Educational Commission in 1967: "is being shaped in her classrooms. The human material emerging out of these classrooms is very much inferior to what was being turned out in 1947. The choice of studies remains mostly divorced from considerations of livelihood."

² Azad, *India Wins Freedom*.

Since the Maulana himself was not conventionally educated, he was keen on showing quick results to prove his competence. Thus instead of waiting for the slow process of revising curricula, remodelling the whole system, he and his associates chose the more spectacular course and spent most of the funds multiplying conventional schools, colleges and universities.

The British not only encouraged but deliberately subsidised sectarian and denominational institutions all over the country. Thus in Northern India, for example, the pattern of education involved an Islamia College for Muslims, a Khalsa College for Sikhs, a D.A.V. College for Arya Samajists, a Sanatan Dharam College for Sanatanists, and here and there a Jain College for Jains and a missionary college for Christians. In all these institutions the general curriculum was uniform but the extra-curricular preachings and activities tended to emphasise divisive sectarian, caste or communal tendencies. In these institutions, the seeds of division were daily sown by educationists. They should have been the first to be nationalised. The Aligarh Muslim University was one institution which the Maulana as a muslim could have nationalised without being misunderstood. And yet it was not only encouraged to retain its Islamic identity, but it continued to be the centre of belligerant muslim communalism lending itself to anti-national and pro-Pakistan activities.³ In his own department, through polarisation, patronage or blatant favouritism, Azad introduced so many Muslim officers, that Vallabhbhai Patel often quipped: "If you want to see a miniature Pakistan, go to the education ministry."

Abul Kalam Azad and his Education Ministry made few contributions if any to the cultural life of the country. Abul Kalam had no interest in sports. He had a passion for Arabic, Persian and Urdu poetry, but he evinced no interest in painting, music or dancing. He founded the "Azad" Museum, but I doubt if he took much interest in its exhibits.

³ "These parochial institutions," the Education Commission observed, "instead of promoting social and national integration and making an active effort to promote national consciousness, promote divisive tendencies."

The Ministry under Azad remained culturally moribund, and showed little interest or pride in the creative arts. It is no wonder that India should still be using a song written by Tagore two decades before Independence as the National Anthem. India paid a very heavy price for keeping Azad employed in a job for which he was least competent, and perpetuating a system of education which could only produce pen-pushers and morons by the millions.

41

The Attempt to Kill Nehru

Nagpur struck me as a dead city : featureless, lifeless, utterly lacking in animation. Traffic moved slowly in its congested streets, impeded by languishing groups of flea-infested cattle. The odour of drying dung got mixed up with the wafted smell of urea and the choking smoke of smouldering dung cakes. Its low, oddly constructed buildings were hardly calculated to rouse a tourist's enthusiasm.

Nagpur was known for its large, sweet, succulent oranges. It was also associated with some very controversial political personalities. In the late twenties the first conspicuous Congressman to sell out to the British and to accept office in the State Government was Tambe. Then there was the gray-bearded Dr Moonje, who started as a Congressman and ended as the head of the Hindu Mahasabha. Dr Khare was Congress Chief Minister in 1937. Khare now represented the extreme, militant Hindu point of view. Guru Golwalkar, the head of the RSS and the Jan Sangh, also had his headquarters in Nagpur. Although the Muslims of Nagpur were backward and generally poor, among a section of Hindus a feeling was growing that like Gandhi, Nehru was pampering the Muslims too much.

I had arrived to attend a national convention. We were waiting in the main park, where a mammoth meeting had been organized for Nehru whose arrival had been delayed. This was Nehru's first visit to Nagpur after becoming the Prime Minister. A long procession of cars had escorted him from the

airport to the city. Hundreds of thousands lined the streets to offer him a royal welcome. When Nehru's car reached a busy crossing, a man pulling a rickshaw suddenly dashed out of the crowd. He passed the motor cyclist outriders, dodged the dozens of armed policemen on duty, and, leaning his rickshaw against the car, jumped on the dash board. He then made for Nehru with a sharp knife. Before he could cause any serious injuries, one of the security men in the car jumped out and caught hold of the assailant. It was this that had delayed Nehru's arrival.

When we met him in the park, he was looking composed. I, however, knew that he was profoundly rattled. His private behest to me was to call up his daughter in Delhi through the police telephone. "I don't want Indira to worry. I will speak to her myself," he said. His second request was that, without attracting notice, I get a chair transported to the thirty feet high rostrum from where he was expected to address the mammoth audience. "I don't have the strength to address standing. Arrange it in such a way that I should be able to sit and speak when I want to," he said. That was the first occasion for Nehru to make use of a chair while addressing a mass meeting.¹ "Six inches of steel, in the hands of a misguided maniac, might have undone the work of a life time!" Speaking to me later, he continued, "One shudders to think what would have happened if this insane youth had succeeded in his mad design! He little realized that by his stupid desperate act he was out to murder a cause, not a human being."

For more than fifty years he had dreamt of a free, united India. Pakistan was his first disillusionment. Even then Nehru had continued to hold steadfastly to secularism and unity. Nehru's forefathers came from Kashmir. But it was not for this reason that he resisted attempts to separate Kashmir from India. For him Kashmir was the acid test of Indian secularism. Kashmir proved to the world that the Hindus who were in a minority could live as happily in Kashmir among an over-

¹ The practice increased with the years till with failing health it became regular.

whelming majority of Muslims, as the Muslims in the rest of the country could live among the Hindus.

Even though Sheikh Abdullah and the Kashmir Constituent Assembly had accepted accession and declared Kashmir a part of the Union territory, it was irritating to find that Kashmir retained its own flag, its own special status, its own separate citizenship and its own "Prime Minister". To some of us who discussed the question of Kashmir with him, Abdullah freely asserted that it would be in everybody's interest if Kashmir was declared autonomous, or even independent like Switzerland, with a guarantee by the United Nations. Disillusioned in his one-time hero, Nehru consented to a change of government in Kashmir. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, the Sheikh's deputy, was asked to form a new Government. After a midnight chase, Sheikh Abdullah was arrested.²

Nehru vehemently asserted that he would not be party to any reorganization of State boundaries on a "linguistic" basis. Basing their demand entirely on the linguistic principle, the people and the Congress leaders of Andhra demanded the separation of the Telugu-speaking areas from Tamil-speaking Madras. The Cabinet rejected the demand. "We shall not be coerced," Nehru said. Feelings ran high. Many heads were broken. Then came the *coup de grace*, the Gandhian weapon, "a fast unto death". When all entreaties and public agitation failed, Sri Potti Sriramulu, a distinguished Congress leader of Andhra, went on an indefinite fast. Government remained resolute and indifferent. Finally Potti Sriramulu was reported dying. Nehru's resistance broke down. He decided to concede the demand. But the offer came too late. Potti had died a martyr to the cause of linguism.

C. D. Deshmukh was a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service. Deshmukh had married a French lady and lost her. Later he married in the late fifties.³ Deshmukh, apart from

² The arrest was ostensibly against Nehru's wishes or "instructions", but had his consent.

³ Durgabai, a capable, corpulent, mature South Indian lady. Durgabai had been a distinguished social and political worker, a lawyer by profession, and a member of the Lok Sabha.

being a financial wizard, was a versatile scholar and a brilliant speaker. He was like Nehru secular-minded. Nehru invited him to become the Finance Minister. India never had a more capable, more competent or more popular Finance Minister.

With the addition to it of two hundred-odd States which made up Saurashtra,⁴ Bombay had become too large. It was decided to divide Bombay into Gujarat and Maharashtra: one Gujarati-speaking, and the other Marathi-speaking. The Government decided to create the metropolitan area of Bombay into a third State even though Bombay was predominantly Maharashtrian. The Gujaratis were pleased. Maharashtra rebelled. Deshmukh was too much of an internationalist to allow language, caste or race to determine his political conduct. And yet he was sensitive enough to feel that the separation of Bombay from Maharashtra was a gross injustice. He had been elected to the Lok Sabha from an important Bombay constituency. He therefore felt it his duty to interpret the will of his constituents and also to protest against the injustice. He resigned. Nehru expected loyalty. He did not appreciate Deshmukh's courage or integrity. He even crudely reprimanded him for falling a prey to "parochialism and linguism".

Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani, were closely allied but were anything but standard languages. There were many whose Hindi had a universal appeal—Kabir, Surdas, Tulsidas, Mirabai. Hindi written or spoken was variously referred to as Bhojpuri, Brajbhasha, Baiswari, etc. Hindustani had developed as a national esperanto. It was the language of popular films, of national songs of Iqbal, Ram Parshad Bismil, Akbar and Chakhast, of bhujans and love ditties, khayals and thumries, and was widely understood and appreciated over most of India. This the Mahatma had in mind when he pleaded for its being accepted as a national language.⁵

⁴The new name of the Union of Western Indian States.

⁵Gandhi (*Harijan*, January 1948) defined Hindi as "Hindustani" in the Devnagri script. He wanted this Hindi to be an amalgam of popular Hindi and Urdu. He was opposed to borrowing too much either from Persian or from Sanskrit on the plea of enriching the language. He proclaimed most emphatically, "I am undoubtedly an advocate of Hindustani....I say that

Having sponsored the constitutional imperative that "Hindi" replace English as the official language by 1965, Congress leaders found themselves the driftwood of a linguistic deluge let loose by Hindi enthusiasts. With fanatical fervour, they began so to Sanskritize popular Hindi that it ceased to have any kinship with Hindustani. It became overnight one of the least understood languages of the country.

E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, an octogenarian with a flowing beard, a stormy voice and a rebellious spirit, was born in an orthodox non-Brahmin family in a small town near Trichy, during a period when the Brahmins in South India dominated the spiritual and intellectual life of the people. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker became a rebel against the caste superiority of the Brahmins. In his eyes, the Brahmin, the idols of Ganesha and Parvati before whom they wanted the common folk to bow and pray, represented different facets of coercion, preventing the Southern non-Brahmins from progressing economically and politically. Naicker sought to fight Brahminism on all fronts, political, spiritual and economic. One of his early associates, Kamaraj Nadar, overthrew the Brahmin oligarchy within the Congress. He became the first non-Brahmin Chief Minister of Madras. Another of his lieutenants, Annadurai, climaxed the struggle against Hindi and Brahminism. Annadurai broke away from E. V. Naicker in the early 'fifties, when he decided at the age of 72 to marry one Maniyammai, a girl of twenty. Annadurai founded the DMK. When the Congress committed itself to imposing Hindi as the official language, it dug its grave in the South. Annadurai called on Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike, the Hindus and the Muslims, all those who spoke Tamil, to join in a common rebellion against the imposition of Hindi. At his behest, thousands of copies of the Indian Constitution were cast into demonstrative

Hindustani will win in the end, as the Sanskritized Hindi is entirely artificial, while Hindustani is quite natural. In the same way, the Persianized Urdu is artificial and unnatural." He wrote further, "Which heart will not throb on hearing Iqbal's 'Hindustan Hamara', whether the language of the song is named Hindi, Hindustani or Urdu."

bonfires. Cinemas where Hindi films were being shown were boycotted and attacked. DMK flags were flown on practically every house, shop and hamlet.

Nehru had survived the assassin's knife. But as time passed he discovered that the ideals he had deeply cherished, one by one, had been stabbed by reality, and the dangers he had apprehended, and the evils he wished to combat, crowded around him like a hydra-headed monster. The India of his dreams was taking a long time a-making! The "Indian" had yet to be born!

42

Alice in Dulles-Land

I had taken two air plants and a rare cactus a friend had sent from Mexico as a birthday gift. It was Nehru's 64th birthday.¹ After a brief discussion on "Cabbages and Kings" as I was taking his leave, Nehru said, "Will I be seeing you this afternoon at the Press Conference?" Nehru's Press Conferences were always a big event. But of this I had no previous notice. The fact that he should have chosen this particular day to hold one was rather unusual.

After birthday greetings from Pressmen, the conference settled down to routine questions and answers. I could not understand why such a rush conference had been called unless the Prime Minister felt that the Press should be offered an opportunity to greet him on his birthdays. After major questions had been disposed of, Nehru suddenly became serious. There was lightning in his eyes. No thunder in his voice! But in what seemed almost like a cloudburst, he told pressmen that he had learnt through a "reliable source" that in her efforts to contain Communism and to convert the Pacific into a guarded "lake", the United States was planning, in the name of collective security, to enter into military pacts with some Asian countries which had no regional proximity to the United States. One of these countries was Pakistan. This inclusion of Pakistan in a military pact would, he said, bring the danger of a cold war to India's back door. Within a few hours of this statement, Zafrullah, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan,

¹ November 14, 1953.

came out with a categorical contradiction and characterised the statement as a "baseless canard". An "official spokesman" of the American Government in Washington emphatically declared that no such plan was being considered. Evidently, neither the official spokesman nor Zafrullah knew that an offer of such a character had been made to Nehru by Truman during his visit to the U.S.A. It had been repeated, he told me, in a more concrete form at the instance of Dulles by Anthony Eden. It had been rejected. "But India cannot tell the United States what it should do," Dulles had then told Eden.

John Foster Dulles² was the eldest son of Rev. Allen Macy Dulles, D.D., a Presbyterian minister, in New York. His grandfather also belonged to the church, but his maternal grandfather, from whom he inherited his first name "John Foster", was a gracious patriarch of the old school. He had served on quite a few diplomatic assignments in his own time. Dulles inherited a deep patriotic fervour from his maternal grandfather, and an almost fanatical devotion to the church from his father and grandfather. Even though a Republican, Truman selected him as a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations. Eisenhower chose him to be the Secretary of State, and offered him practically a free hand in determining the foreign policy of the country. Thus, with a weak President in office, Dulles became, during a very crucial period in world history, the most powerful single policy-making authority in the United States. The cold war had then set in. Dulles and those of his way of thinking saw in Communism a much greater menace, not only to world peace, but also to all that "Western civilization" stood for, than in Fascism or Nazism.

Dulles also saw in Communism a "challenge to Christianity". In his eyes Communism was a serious danger not only to the "State", but also to the "Church". If Dulles had been born in the middle ages, he would have led some army or the other in the crusades! It was in the spirit of a medieval crusader that he approached the challenge of Communism. Where Stalin

² Born February 25, 1888.

and Mao Tse-tung were concerned, he could not think in terms of "co-existence". In his eyes the Christian countries in Europe, that had adopted a Communist system, had been forcibly dragooned into accepting political "atheism". It was for him as a defender of the Faith and of the Western people to fight for their "liberation".³ Thus, in trying with fanatical zeal to meet the menace of "atheistic" Communism, John Foster Dulles himself became a serious menace to world peace. It happened that soon after Dulles assumed office, Stalin died. Dulles thus became the "Stalin" of the democracies.

Nehru never liked Stalin. Stalin considered Nehru a bourgeois. Dulles was also of a type Nehru could not like. Even more than that, Dulles had plans in which Nehru did not fit. If Stalin wanted satellites, Dulles wanted puppets. Having strengthened NATO with the inclusion of West Germany, Dulles began looking Eastwards. It was during this search for allies that India had been sounded through Eden, the then Foreign Minister of England, if it would join the alliance. Nehru had given an emphatic "No". Dulles was not the type to alter his plans to fit realities. He was one who would use all his energies and resources to force realities to fit his plans. Having got a "No" from India he sounded Pakistan and found it eager and willing.

A few months later Dulles and Vice-President Nixon⁴ paid a visit to India. I had met Dulles a few years earlier at Lake Success. His speeches those days were well written, but his ideas always ran in one groove—"anti-Communism". His bi-focals framed in white metal resting on his nose, his face wearing a fixed frenzied expression, his voice monotonously gruff, his lips twitching in between words, his language Biblical in emphasis, his political ideas a mixture of Hobbes, Locke, Bergson and Jefferson, Dulles thundered like an evangelist, invoking the wrath of heaven on the Red despots who were out to destroy the kingdom of God, the soul of man and the economy of the United States. He seemed to me like a human

³ Eleanor Lansing Dulles, *John Foster Dulles — The Last Year*, p. 99.

⁴ Elected President in 1968 on the Republican ticket.

road-roller, propelled by only one motivation, the creation of a massive deterrent to curb the spread of Communism, if this was possible, or to destroy Communism if that became necessary.

Nehru received Dulles and Nixon according to strict formalities of protocol. They were entertained to the usual banquets and receptions. They were invited to address a joint session of Parliament. There was a Press Conference and a tea-cum-coffee reception by the American Ambassador, George Allen. During all this one could not escape a feeling of frigidity on both sides. While addressing Parliament and speaking to the Press, it seemed as if Dulles was trying to walk on egg shells, impatient to leave India as quickly as possible. To assuage Nehru and to cover up the earlier leakage of his plans, Dulles, while expatiating on the need for pacts and alliances to contain Communism, solemnly declared that while some kind of arrangements along the lines of collective security were being considered, India would be consulted before any of these arrangements were finalised so far as South-East Asia was concerned. At the Press Conference, I sent a written question, asking whether the statement meant that no commitment would be made to Pakistan before India was consulted. Dulles parried an answer by pleading "shortage of time". At Nehru's insistence I walked up to Dulles at the Ambassador's party and asked if he had now the time to answer my question. Nehru stood by. Dulles gave me an angry look. "I can't add anything to what I have said," he said curtly, "not till I have been to Pakistan." The next day Dulles and Nixon flew to Karachi. A military pact was signed with Pakistan, without even the pretence of a previous consultation with India.

To Nehru this was one of the biggest challenges of his life. Through one insane act, which later contributed little to American security, and added very little to the collective deterrent he was trying to build, Dulles undid the grand work of many Americans who, ever since the forties had established a bridge of understanding, mutual respect and confidence between the United States and India.

Nehru saw in the Dulles plan a serious danger to democracy and freedom. These fears and suspicions did not seem unfounded. When Pakistan joined both the Baghdad Pact and SEATO, they became very real. It was soon discovered that the pacts included what was later known as the "Anti-subversion Clause". The Anti-subversion Clause had a sinister background. It was originally devised by Dulles⁵ to fight subversion by collective help in Latin American countries. Most of these governments were headed by puppets or were under dictatorial regimes depending on American help and enjoying American support. The anti-subversion clause ostensibly aimed at preventing subversion in the pact countries by Communists. In essence it meant preservation and perpetuation, by collective force if necessary, of the ruling party or junta, or even a colonial power functioning at the time in the pact-signing countries.

I visited Indo-China in 1950. I felt then that the French were on the way out. They did not have the resources or the military strength to hold down the people. Even though they were ruling in the name of Emperor Bao Dai, the popular leader who enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people was Ho Chi Minh. Bao Dai's writ did not extend beyond the hundred-room palace at Hue, where he lived with his few dozen wives and several concubines. At the time it was estimated that there were eighteen thousand spies, twenty thousand white and Annamite prostitutes, a hundred and fifty thousand French soldiers, of whom seventy per cent were African colonials, mostly concentrated in the city of Saigon. While the French governed by day, their soldiers scaled the fortified towers on all major roads by sunset, and Ho Chi Minh ruled "by night".

Thailand, another member of the SEATO alliance, had an area of 200,000 square miles, a population of 18 million and an army of five thousand soldiers. Its 24-year-old King at that time had been out of Thailand for eighteen years as much for reasons of security as for education. His illustrious father, King Ananda, had been found mysteriously dead one morning in

⁵In 1953.

1946. The explanation: "an overdose of castor-oil". His Majesty King Phumiphon had shown keen interest in "hot" music, racing cars and photography. Some of his jazzy compositions had received top billing in Michael Todd's show in Broadway. "Bangkok swing", one of his "groovy" numbers, had become the rage among jazz lovers. Even though "democratic" constitutions had been in the making from time to time, the man in dictatorial control was the Prime Minister, Marshal Pibul Songram. Having been the victim of treachery and rebellion variously by the army, the air force and the navy, he channelled the latest U.S. military aid equipment, including bombers, to the police, thereby creating a fourth force to fortify his position as a dictator. I asked the Marshall whether his 5,000 Thai soldiers, even if equipped with the most modern American weapons, could resist any serious aggression from the North. He graciously smiled and said, "No," and added, "but it pays"!

If SEATO was a make-believe, the Baghdad pact was an association of strange bed-fellows in distress. It ended in a fiction the ineffectiveness of which even Dulles could not explain, back home, to his critics. Since he had been rebuffed by India, Pakistan offered to serve as a dual link between a near-eastern and a mid-western alliance. It further offered to the United States vital bases from where American bombers could reach the Russian and Chinese territories, in time of any crisis, and from where U-2 planes could carry out reconnoitring sorties, when needed, in times of peace. The nearest Western link Dulles could forge with Pakistan was Turkey. Turkey was the end outpost of the NATO alliance. Having established a link between Pakistan and Turkey, Dulles started to fill in the gap. Syria, a neighbour of Turkey, had just emerged out of French tutelage but was hovering between one army dictatorship and another. In Egypt, King Farouk and the aristocracy of the corrupt Pashas were on the way out. A military regime under General Naguib was on its way in. Naguib was later replaced by Nasser. In Iraq, the Hashimite dynasty was ruling through Nuri Pasha and a feudal junta,

subsidised by foreign oil interests. The monarchy in Jordan was in a state of permanent instability virtually reduced to a puppet. In Saudi Arabia, King Saud and Prince Faisal were playing musical chairs. In Iran, Premier Mosaddaq had nationalized foreign oil companies, and between him and the King a tussle for power was at its height.

In this whirlpool of unstable dictatorships and decadent feudalism, Dulles steamrolled himself in search for allies willing to join his chain of collective security. He succeeded in roping in Iraq. The Baghdad Pact was signed with Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan as members. Before the ink was dry Nuri Pasha was murdered and the leftists came into power in Iraq. The "Baghdad Pact" was left without "Baghdad".

While in public speeches in India and abroad Nehru preserved an element of dignity and restraint, in private he made no secret of his anger and of his hostility towards Dulles. He felt Dulles was not only a danger to world peace, but also a menace to the freedom of colonial people. Dulles, on his part, continued the pretence of treating India as a friendly "aid-receiving free country". But he spared no opportunity for making India's position more and more irksome. Apart from giving mammoth economic and military aid to Pakistan, he used all his influence to secure support for Pakistan in the dispute over Kashmir. He manoeuvred so well that at one time it seemed to many in the U.N. as if India was the aggressor and usurper, and Pakistan an aggrieved party. Outraged by these antics, Nehru declared, "I feel like Alice in wonderland. The world is becoming curioser and curioser."

When Portugal became a member of NATO, Nehru protested. Dulles not only ignored this protest, but did something which he knew would deeply outrage India. The Foreign Minister of Portugal, Monsieur Nogera, was specially invited to pay an "official" visit to Washington. Everyone knew that India had been insisting on the vacation of Goa, the last colonial possession on Indian soil. It was also well known that Portugal had adopted the Machiavellian device of designating its colonies as "provinces", thereby claiming them as part of

Portugal. Dulles was too well-informed a person, having not only been actually engaged in international affairs since the Versailles Treaty, but having physically travelled more than a million miles all over the globe to know that Portugal was a despotic colonial power and Goa was one among its several colonial territories awaiting liberation. And yet he issued a joint statement with the Portuguese Foreign Minister in which he pointedly declared Goa "to be a Portuguese province". Considering the inanities that filled the rest of the statement it seemed as if the entire visit was engineered only to endorse Portugal's untenable position in Goa.

Having practically "ordered" the NATO countries to collaborate in a joint command for "collective security", Dulles felt that the Eastern nations need not even expect to be ordered. They should deem it a "privilege" to join the pacts. Finding Nehru stubborn, he thought that by shopping in Karachi, he could bully or blackmail India into joining the Dulles band-wagon in due course. Meanwhile, Russia had exploded an atom bomb, and had perfected the still more dangerous hydrogen bomb. Russia had launched a sputnik in space—Khrushchev declared that rockets and ballistic missiles were on the way. China was still dependent on Russia for modern military equipment, but was wasting no time mobilising and training its manpower. The danger was that soon it would have the largest army in the world. Its target was ten million men under arms. In the face of these challenges, the Dulles threat of "massive retaliation" through such pigmy allies as South Korea, Formosa, Thailand, or even such fair-weather friends as Turkey, Iran or Pakistan, lost its meaning. Dulles played with "Brinkmanship" as a game of bluff.⁶

⁶ "Three times (wrote LIFT in January, 1956) Dulles had brought the world to the brink of war in his pursuit of peace." Adlai Stevenson pictured him as playing "Russian roulette." Actually it was poker with high stakes. Dulles' own interpretation of the "Art of Brinkmanship" was given in the same article. "You have to take chances for peace, just as you must take chances in war," he said. "The ability to get to the verge, without getting into the war, is the necessary art. If you cannot master it, you inevitably get into war. If you try to run away from it, if you are scared,

Nehru, like many others, feared that any time in this mad gamble of brinkmanship Dulles might go too far, or miscalculate the opponent's strength, mood or temper. If this happened it would not be an international war but an indiscriminate destruction of belligerants and neutrals alike. This sense of danger to peace, apart from the danger from Pakistan, through its conversion into a NATO arsenal, provoked Nehru into powerful counteraction. This search for counteraction gave a new purpose to India's foreign policy. Nehru realized that not only was world peace in danger, but India's very safety was in peril. He had to do something effective and spectacular to save both.

to go to the brink, you are lost. We've had to look it squarely in the face—on the question of enlarging the Korea war, on the question of getting into the Indo-China war, on the question of Formosa. We walked up to the brink and looked it into the face. We took strong action."

43

Menon's "Jericho"

Tall, lean and lanky, he stood out conspicuously among the thousand-odd delegates to the United Nations, being the only one carrying a walking stick, and the only one wearing his curly, pepper-and-gray hair long enough to be mistaken for an off-Broadway actor, an artist from Greenwich village or a visiting Yogi. His deep-set, dark, hypnotic eyes emphasised the Yogi in him, although the manner in which he spiralled his lanky frame against his walking stick while standing, or dragging his legs in slow motion, suggested more of an actor than of the Yogi.

When I started the first¹ of my five years as a delegate to the United Nations, V. K. Krishna Menon had ceased to be a personality—he had become an institution: India, Asia, anti-colonialism, 'tea'-totalism, disarmament, Fabian-Marxism, anti-Dullesism, all rolled into one. He was a man of many complexes, with an abundant capacity to invite controversies around himself, and a rare knack for doing and saying the unpredictable. He delighted in hurting some people, just as much as he tried hard to please others. He could be boorish in his arrogance, and yet he could be as humble as the "Admirable Mr Crichton" in politeness. In the United Nations, while officially he was only the Head of the Indian delegation, he was looked upon as the alter-ego of Nehru, in the same manner as Dulles was looked upon as the alter-ego of Dwight

¹ 1957.

Eisenhower.² But the two were completely different personalities. Unlike Dulles who rose rapidly in the profession attracting fabulous fees in Wall Street, Krishna Menon preferred the advocacy of the penniless in the forums of the common people—Hyde Park Corner, Caxton Hall, and St Pancras. From the late 'twenties onwards the hobbits of Hyde Park, the student audiences in Caxton Hall, the underfed and undernourished workers of St Pancras had become familiar with the hoarse, rasping voice of a lanky Hindu youth with long curly hair, wearing loose but elegantly tailored clothes, almost threadbare through constant use, advocating freedom for India, Ireland and all colonial peoples, a better life for the British worker and an end to Capitalism in the world. Very few knew where Krishna Menon lived. But all his friends knew that he mostly lived on tea, pintfuls of it, day and night, with a little bread, a few buns, or a couple of biscuits added at indifferent intervals. On hot scones he could make a banquet.

In later life he added several dozen well-tailored, costly suits to his wardrobe. He purchased neckties from the best haberdashers in London, Paris and New York. But he retained the habit of strewing biscuit crumbs all over his clothes, and carrying on his sleeves, coat lapels and neckties the tell-tale smudges of good Indian tea. Having "slummed" in London for more than twenty years, Krishna became anti-Capitalist. His "Socialism" became anti-racialism, anti-colonialism and anti-

² I met V.K.K. first in the 'twenties when he visited India with two Labour Members of Parliament, Fenner Brockway and Leonard Matters. He then agreed to write for my paper. Vengalil Krishnan Kunji-Krishna Menon was born on May 3, 1896, at Passiakara in the city of Calicut, in Kerala. This was eight years after Dulles. While the father of Dulles was a parson, the father of Menon was a lawyer. His was a family of eight. There were six sisters and two brothers. Menon was the third, but the eldest son of the family. Menon lost his mother when he was still an infant. He grew up under the care of his eldest sister, till he left for England on a scholarship from the Theosophical Society founded by Mrs Annie Besant. In England he took his B.Sc. degree with honours from the London School of Economics, and derived his socialistic ideas from its distinguished Head, a scholar of international repute, Professor Harold Laski. He also qualified for the Bar.

West-End snobbery. His "Socialism" later continued, but his way of life evened up with West-End standards.

Just like his views, Menon's physical appearance was also a matter of controversy. Several of his feminine admirers deemed him handsome, not only because he was tall, but also because he had sharp, chiselled features, a striking nose, dark, deep-set hypnotic eyes, a well-shaped head, and the most effeminate hands with long, tapering fingers. His detractors, especially in the United States, viewing him in television appearances, considered his dark face demoniacal, and his grin the smile of Lucifer. About his long hair there is an interesting story. In High School, Krishna Menon was chosen to play a woman's role (*Gubba*) in *Alfred and the Cakes*. Krishna allowed his hair to grow long to be able to play his feminine part more realistically. Everybody admired the curly locks. The rehearsals were almost over, when the headmaster learnt that a boy was playing the part of a woman in the play. He refused to allow a boy to "masquerade" in woman's clothes in public.³ Not to be put out, Krishna argued that the headmaster's objection was not to a woman being in the play, but to a "boy masquerading as a woman". Menon appeared in his long curls but in men's trousers and a jacket, repeating his part in a sleek woman's voice. He faced the jeers and catcalls with courage, then as in later life.

Unlike Dulles, Menon was not a brilliant student. But they both shared the habit of reading thrillers and detective stories between periods of tense activity. Dulles liked fishing, rowing, whist, poker, and bridge. Menon liked toys—all kinds of toys, and when alone played with them. He had also learnt a few tricks. The vanishing match box, balancing the stick, the handkerchief mystery, etc. with which he not only kept children engaged, but also attracted grown-ups who preferred magic tricks to controversial speeches. Both had abstemious habits. Dulles munched peanuts all times and any time. Krishna drank tepid tea any time and all the time. Menon remained a bachelor, but delighted in feminine company. He was prone to

³ T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, p. 27.

capitulate more easily to a pretty woman's charms than to a brilliant man's arguments. Dulles was very much of a married man. He was too serious-minded to indulge in any flippant diversions. Looking at him one could not imagine him pretending love even as a passing make-believe.

Krishna Menon, as the first Indian High Commissioner in London, had been an overall disappointment to Nehru, though he did not admit it. Krishna spent public funds lavishly, buying nothing less than Rolls Royce cars, the best furniture, Wedgwood china, the most expensive carpets and drapery. Not having been an administrator, Menon also got himself involved in several unexplainable deals, which made him the vulnerable target of censorious criticism in India and abroad.

Besides being the Prime Minister of India, Nehru had been Foreign Minister and even a stop-gap Defence Minister and Finance Minister at times. He found the load heavy. Although he did not wish to give up the glamour and the glory of being Foreign Minister, Nehru soon felt the need for someone who could take away from him the burden of detail and who could travel to world capitals and to world conferences, and project India's thinking on international matters. No one in the party was well informed enough to take up this task. His senior party colleagues had been more concerned with national affairs than with international matters. Only a few of them had even travelled abroad. The need for the trouble-shooter became urgent, after Dulles started fishing in Asian waters and brought the danger of war to India's backdoor. It was at this critical juncture that Krishna Menon was named Ambassador at large with the rank of Minister.

Khrushchev and Bulganin now headed the new team of rulers in Moscow. They tried calling a summit of East-West leaders but were rebuffed by Dulles. They however found Nehru receptive to a friendly gesture, partly because he sincerely desired to reduce cold war tensions before it became a hot war, and partly because he also wanted some kind of a breakthrough to counteract the malevolent designs of Dulles. They invited Nehru to visit Russia. The Russians accorded him an

unprecedented reception. They made him realize that the new rulers of Russia, while militarily more than prepared to accept any Western challenge, wanted peace. Besides peace, they were willing to consider an agreed programme of general disarmament and the banning of nuclear weapons. They also wanted to break away from Stalinism. They had no desire to encourage Comintern activities, or to force Communism on other people or countries. Nehru came back deeply impressed. He always had a bias for Marxism. He had many stories to tell, how Russia had marshalled its economy through successive plans, and how Russia was rapidly advancing in scientific research. It had not only developed a nuclear arsenal, he said, but was about to make spectacular experiments in space.

Soon after, Nehru visited China. Nehru had been a great personal friend of Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, and an ardent admirer of Madame Chiang. When the communist revolution took place, Nehru was not entirely happy. But he soon reconciled himself to the inevitable. The Indian ambassador to China during the change-over was a personal friend of Nehru.⁴ It was as much due to his remarkable ability as to his extraordinary adaptability, that the new Communist rulers of China, Mao Tse-tung, Chen Yi and Chou En-lai found Panikkar as acceptable as did the pro-American dictator Marshal Chiang Kai-shek. With them he shifted from Kunming to Peking, the new Capital. Panikkar arranged an invitation for Nehru. Nehru spent ten days in China. Millions of flag-waving Chinese lined the routes along which he passed. He had gone suspicious of the international objectives of the new Chinese rulers, especially after the forcible entry of Chinese troops into Tibet in 1950. Whether it was the very flattering reception accorded to him that influenced his judgment, or because he was in a mood to develop a better understanding in the East,

⁴K. M. Panikkar, M.A. (Oxon), had started life as a Professor. He was a scholar and an author. He joined the Congress movement in the early twenties. After a brief adventure in journalism (he was my predecessor as Editor of *The Hindustan Times*) and the national struggle, he served as a Minister in several Indian States. He was one among the old friends chosen by Nehru for an ambassadorial post.

to counteract the puppet-seeking policies of Dulles, Nehru returned full of admiration for the new rulers of China, and shorn of suspicions, which he had earlier shared with Vallabhbhai Patel.

Convinced in the belief that China like Russia had no expansionist designs, and believing that something positive and spectacular should be done to mobilise the uncommitted people of Asia and Africa to assert their collective strength on the side of peace, Nehru and a few others took the initiative to call a conference of Afro-Asian countries at Bandung. Ever since his first visit to Indonesia, Nehru had developed a great liking for the Indonesian people, and great personal regard for Soekarno.⁵ Indonesia was predominantly Muslim. Nehru came away with the impression that the Muslims of Indonesia were more secular-minded than the Pakistanis and seemed inclined if not determined to keep religion out of national and international politics. For this reason, and because of a common colonial background, Indonesia was chosen as the site of the conference. The picturesque city of Bandung, ensconced in volcanic hills, with its large hotels abounding in mammoth Conference Halls, was chosen for the gathering. More than twenty-nine Afro-Asian countries and many observers attended the meet. Soekarno's Government spent lavishly to lend splendour to the Conference, partly because it put Indonesia on the world map and more so because it threw the spectacular personality of Dr Soekarno in the international limelight. Menon did all the negotiating, the drafting and the spadework. Nehru emerged as the architect of the grand plan. From this it was hoped would emerge a collective effort towards lessening of world tensions, if not also a movement designed to counteract colonialism and Dullesism.

After almost a week of negotiations and deliberations the Conference produced a declaration, which was in reality no more than a paraphrase of the Charter of the United Nations.⁶

⁵ This was short lived.

⁶ The declaration was hammered into five major heads to harmonise with the five peace principles of the Buddha, the dominant law-giver of the East.

In India, Bandung was trumpeted as a great achievement, a sort of landmark in the history of Afro-Asian relations, and the initiator of some kind of an international movement to promote peace. In reality, apart from offering Nehru, Chou En-lai, Mohammed Nasser and Mohammed Soekarno an international forum to preach their ideas and to project their distinctly different personalities, the "Five Pillars" of the Bandung declaration were as much sand-built as the Manila and Baghdad Pacts were a house of cards.

Communist China's presence for the first time at such an international meet was heralded as a great achievement. Everybody including Nehru and Menon boosted Chou En-lai as a "promoter of peace and non-alignment." It was strangely not realized that China was not "unaligned" or "peace-minded". China had already a military alliance with Russia. China had only recently fought the United Nations in Korea and had occupied Tibet by force. One could not understand how Chou En-lai could be a signatory to the "Five Principles", unless the leopard had suddenly decided to change its spots. Among Asians, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, were members of SEATO and their presence obviously meant that they were willing to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Nehru through his spell-binding capacity to gild illusion with reality, however, convinced India and some of the Asian people that the foundations on which unalignment was based were solid and that Bandung marked the beginning of a grand movement towards peace and co-existence in the world. Nehru sincerely believed that Bandung had sabotaged the Dulles concept of collective security by specifically laying down that "there should be no external pressures on nations, and that collective defence should not be used to serve the particular interests of the Big Powers".⁷ Later events proved that weak and dependent African and Asian nations soon forgot the com-

The Indonesian Constitution was already based on "Panch Shila"—five pillars. By the time the formula reached India linguistic experts changed it into "Panch-Sheel", the five principles of peaceful co-existence.

⁷ Speech in the Lok Sabha, April 30, 1955.

mitments of Bandung. The Big Powers could get "yes-men" for the asking. As an Asian Prime Minister later remarked,⁸ "There is a revulsion from the lengthening queue of those who shuffle cap in hand up to the American pay-desk, and from the divisions for dollars deals... in exchange for massive United States economic assistance."

Though the achievements at Bandung had been illusory, Nehru's international stature rose very high. The voice of India began to command considerable respect and attention in world Capitals and in the United Nations. Russian leaders began relying on Nehru to remove the fears and suspicions of some of the Asian and African countries regarding Communist expansion. They looked upon him as a useful channel of communication between Russia and the Western world. Though China had designs of its own, Chou En-lai found in Nehru a powerful supporter for its admission to the U.N. and a pliant neighbour so far as its plans about Tibet were concerned. Though Dulles remained grumpy and hostile, many American policy-makers gradually began to appreciate the stand India had taken and the manner in which Nehru had been trying to hold the balance between the Communist and anti-Communist countries. India was not among those who had agreed to trade gun-fodder for dollars. Even then when India reluctantly lined up "cap in hand" for economic aid, it was treated as a V.I.P. Some Americans even saw an unexpected virtue in extending military aid to Pakistan and economic aid to India. Whether Pakistan was an opportunist or an unreliable ally, Pakistan was certainly in no position to equip its Army with the latest armour and to build up an effective Navy and Air Force without American aid. But because of Pakistan, India, they speculated, would feel compelled to seek modern weapons and equipment for its Army, Navy and Air Force. If it ever came to a showdown with China or Russia on the basis of Communism versus Democracy, India could not remain neutral. Thus by equipping Pakistan with military

⁸ Interview with Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore), *The Hindustan Times*, 12th December, 1967, p. 9.

equipment, and by giving generous economic aid to India, whereby it could divert some of its own funds to buy modern weapons, they would have on their side two well-equipped armies instead of one!

A Festival of Celebrities

Nehru had now been Prime Minister for more than thirteen years. He had dominated Indian public life and politics as no man had done in living memory in any democratic country of the world since Roosevelt and Churchill. He was not a "dictator". Did not aspire to be one. But no dictator during the last half a century had enjoyed so much power, swayed so completely the minds and thinking of so many people, and received so much willing homage from so many millions of his countrymen.

Internationally, Nehru's credit stood very high. Whether he was visiting the United States, Russia, China, or Egypt, millions of common citizens came out to receive and cheer him as if he were their own leader rather than merely a visiting foreign dignitary. In Indonesia Dr Soekarno said to me, "So great was popular enthusiasm for your Prime Minister that at times I felt jealous of him myself." His visit to Bali, remarked Dr Soekarno with a mischevious smile, was most costly. The whole population turned up to cheer him. Balinese women normally wear "topless". But on this occasion thousands of yards of cloth was consumed in one day, because someone spread the idea that the sight of so many Balinese in natural abandon may make "Nehru blush". Frankly, in Madison, Wisconsin, Nehru did blush. We had made a night's halt in the University Inn. At an informal dinner the Security Chief accompanying him disclosed that he had found two girls hiding behind curtains. Suspicious of their movements he

asked them why they were hiding. "Do you think he will terribly mind if we held him and kissed him." The story brought embarrassing blushes to Nehru. Even though he was past sixty, pretty women everywhere still crowded around him, not only because he was a hero and an international celebrity, but also because they deemed him "very handsome". Dr Einstein to the end of his life looked forward to a visit from Nehru every time he was in the States. I visited Einstein at Princeton quite a few times. He was a great admirer of Gandhi and Nehru. "Any country that can produce Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru in one generation has nothing to fear," he said once. Referring particularly to Nehru, he said, "He combines Tagore's love for beauty, and Gandhi's spiritualism, with a dynamic scientific mind of his own." Nehru was a proclaimed "Socialist". He was even inclined to be a Marxist. And yet among his private hosts in the United Kingdom were some notable Dukes and Earls. In the United States the Rockefellers, the Fords and the Duponts felt proud of having him as a guest.

The 1960 Session of the General Assembly was unusual and unique in U.N. history. In early September, Khrushchev left for Paris to attend the Summit Conference with President Charles De Gaulle, President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. On the very day Khrushchev left for Paris a young American pilot, Col. Powers, flew out from the American base near Peshawar in Pakistan in a U-2 jet on a routine reconnoitring expedition over Soviet territory. Reaching Soviet territory, the U-2 lost height and was forced by Soviet fliers to land in Russia. Khrushchev was mad. He wanted an assurance that such secret intrusions into Soviet territory should stop. Eisenhower could not give such an assurance. Khrushchev filibustered the Summit. Having created a crisis, Khrushchev appealed to all Heads of State to attend the forthcoming U.N. General Assembly to seek ways and means to stop "the arms race and the stock-piling of destructive nuclear arms".

It was the year of the Presidential elections in the U.S.A. Eisenhower was still in office; Kennedy and Nixon were cam-

paigning. The polling was in November. Having invited all Heads of State, Khrushchev left for New York by sea, taking with him the heads of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania. He could not be communicated with till his boat reached New York, on the day the Assembly was fixed to meet. Nehru, like many others in different countries, felt not only that such a collection of top leaders of the world, soon after the failure of the Summit in the midst of the Presidential campaign in the United States, was ill-timed, but would also be purposeless. He was completely disinclined. Then reports came that the heads of NATO countries, including Mr Harold Macmillan, Mr Menzies, etc. were leaving for New York to match up with Khrushchev's leftist contingent. Seeing that the two blocs would be fully represented, the Afro-Asians decided to attend. It seemed as if Khrushchev had set in motion a chain reaction.

When Khrushchev's boat finally arrived at the "Battery" on a rainy day, Manhattan was echoing to the mad medley of police sirens, the horn-tooting of outriders, conveying a galaxy of international celebrities to and fro between the U.N. and their respective places of residence. Never had so many world celebrities attended an international gathering at any time in history. Apart from the occasion being unique, it enabled one to get intimate close-ups of some of the great men who were shaping the destiny of the world at the time, and to measure their stature against each other.

Eisenhower made only one appearance at the U.N. While he still retained the "father image" for many Americans, he had lost the glamour attaching to a successful General, or even to a man who had served as American President for two terms. He was gradually, though gracefully, revealing the signs of mature mediocrity. He represented a type of greatness which comes and goes with office. Yet he did represent a style of dignity which qualified him for respect, even without office or position. Intellectually the two contenders for Presidential office had outshone him. Kennedy, particularly in trying to expose the reactionary and militant policies of the Republicans,

had smothered Eisenhower under a spate of vitriolic censure. He was himself emerging, at the same time, as a leader with a global concept, the dynamic, lustrous, fiery symbol of a new age in the United States. Nixon by contrast sounded mediocre.

Harold Macmillan of England had a Scotsman's pragmatic approach to political problems. He was typical of post-war British politicians who aimed at a *status quo* rather than at high heaven. He spoke with deliberation, employed the precise word, avoided the hyperbolic or the spectacular, and presented his case with a brevity and clarity few could excel. Harold Macmillan was not of the stature of an Asquith, a Lloyd George or a Churchill. Men like Menzies of Australia, Thomas Holland of New Zealand, Couve de Murville of France, or other Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers from European and most Latin American countries represented the "play safe" type whose primary concern after the war was to recoup the losses of war and extend the period of peace. Not one of them had qualities which could qualify him to an outstanding place in history.

In Eastern Europe there was something really outstanding about Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia and Khrushchev of Russia. Khrushchev represented a departure from the personality cult of Stalin: Stalin's rigid approach to the cold war, and Stalin's coercive, repressive and barbarous measures to enforce his supreme dictatorship. I had met Khrushchev earlier when he visited India with Marshal Bulganin. This was their first great breakthrough as Communist leaders. Bulganin looked almost Pickwickian. Roly-poly Nikita, his bullet head covered by an ill-fitting hat, moving among the crowds with rustic simplicity, shaking hands with presidential guards and hobnobbing with wayside policemen offered to Indian crowds a refreshing departure from the distant formalism of foreign celebrities. In their ill-tailored suits they looked like "Gallagher and Sheen" in an Ed Sullivan show. In Calcutta when a flat tyre brought their open car to a halt, they got mixed up with the crowds and were still enjoying hand shakes when Security Guards rushed in an armoured car to rescue them from a fatal mêlée. Although Khrushchev did say many nasty and violent things, and even

adopted many threatening postures, as over Berlin, over Cuba, over Vietnam, to preserve his popularity and position at home, he sincerely wanted a better understanding with America. The U.N. had witnessed a lot of clapping of hands, and even a little thumping of tables to emphasise applause, or to register opposition. Khrushchev, however, broke new ground during this session. When Harold Macmillan was addressing the Assembly, and saying something about the Summit meeting at Paris which Khrushchev considered wrong, like a village urchin he unlaced his shoes, and began to thump the table so violently that even his own colleagues looked embarrassed.

The American Government had restricted his movements by pleading that they could not make security arrangements out of New York. Khrushchev protested and told the Press that the only place he wanted to visit out of New York was Disney Land, the grand creation of a phantom world by Walt Disney on the West Coast. That Khrushchev did not deem anything more valuable or worthwhile in U.S.A. except Disney Land was the greatest "satire" on American civilization. Khrushchev carried his emotions on his coat lapels. Even his "make-believe" seemed genuine. His face would blaze with anger one minute, and in the next he would be laughing genially like a schoolboy. His laughter was as hilarious as his indignation was spontaneous, unrestricted and righteous. But his moods had nothing sinister about them.¹ His written speeches were well prepared, but his extempore interventions always had a rustic touch. In trying to illustrate what he meant by "teaching a lesson", he referred to his peasant aunt, and the cat which had licked off a lot of her cream. "My aunt", he said, "got hold of the cat and rubbed its nose in the empty vessel till the cat squealed. The cat never stole the cream again."

¹ "Khrushchev," I wrote at the time, "behaves almost like a child when moved by emotion and tears trickle down his eyes in response to the least sentimental impulse." He loves to break down the barriers of protocol and to offend against convention. He once deliberately mistook a U.N. attendant standing by the King of Jordan, who always appeared in a military uniform, for a VIP and saluted him. He never hesitated to return insult for insult, or a good act by a better one."

Nehru gave a dinner to the Heads of State attending the U.N. at the "Carlyle".² The dinner was unique not only in respect of the controversial personalities who attended but also in respect of the magic Nehru touch whereby known political opponents sat side by side in an atmosphere of social co-existence. At one table at one time or the other sat President Nasser of the U.A.R., Golda Meir of Israel, Couve de Murville of France. At another sat Wilcox of the U.S.A., Castro of Cuba, Sir Pearson Dixon of the U.K., and the Prime Minister of Hungary. At Nehru's table Khrushchev sat to his right and Tito to his left.³ At a large side-table a number of specially prepared Indian and Western dishes were laid. Everyone was allowed a generous helping of drinks of his choice: whisky, vodka or rare wines. After guests had settled down with a selected first course, there was no movement at our table. Catching a hint from the Prime Minister I took away Tito's plate and returned with one full of selected Indian dishes. Nehru took Khrushchev's and brought back a fair selection for both, with some extras for the rest. "Your Excellency," said Khrushchev, overwhelmed at this gesture, "you know what this hospitality means for me when I get back? For every pound I put on I will have to live on boiled cabbage for two days." And yet, deeming that what the Prime Minister had brought had to be consumed, he ate away even the "extras". A little later, as everyone moved away for the next course, Khrushchev was missing. His interpreter had no explanation to offer. While some were standing and some had returned to their seats, one noticed a large, fruit-laden basket moving from the buffet-table towards the host's seat. From under the basket emerged the bullet head of Khrushchev wearing the broad smile of a gargoyle. "At your service. Your Excellency". It was his way of reciprocating Nehru's gesture.

Tito, unlike Khrushchev, conducted himself with feudal dig-

² One of the most aristocratic hotels in New York.

³ I sat next to Tito, and Krishna Menon next to Khrushchev. Gromyko sat next to Menon, followed by Ambassador Ali Yavar Jung. Next to me sat Dr Soekarno, followed by Ambassador B. K. Nehru.

nity, and even though he wore civilian clothes at the U.N., he maintained a martial bearing. Jose Bros Tito was the first foreign dignitary to be invited by Nehru to India in the early 'fifties. I had read a great deal about Tito. His break from Russia, his setting up a separate Communist state, his receiving a large quantum of aid from the U.S.A. to rehabilitate Yugoslavia, and his wizardry in steering clear of political pressures from Russia on the one hand and the U.S.A. on the other. Even then I could not understand why of all the world celebrities Nehru should have given such high priority to Tito. It was only when I met the Yugoslav President that I realized his unrivalled, uncanny ability for analysing and assessing current world problems with the precision of an expert doctor, and devising a line of approach for like-minded nations to bypass rival power alignments and still contribute to peace. Tito was a man of courage, a statesman of rare ability, and a champion of the weak, the underdeveloped and needy. But unlike Khrushchev, even though risen from humble beginnings himself, he liked feudal splendour. He was a man of epicurean tastes, with a discerning eye for the best.⁴ He was the Western counterpart of Nehru in this, and in representing the brain-trust of unalignment.

Nasser was outstanding among Arab leaders, just as Nkrumah then stood out among the Africans. Nkrumah however was a small man by comparison with others. Opportunity had temporarily thrown him into the limelight. I had this story from the Prime Minister as an example of his undue sensitivity. He and Nehru were attending a meeting of the unaligned at Belgrade, to devise steps to persuade nuclear powers to agree to the suspension of nuclear experiments. Nehru had been invited by the Russian Government for an official visit, which followed the Belgrade Conference. The Conference appointed Nehru and Dr Nkrumah to constitute a delegation of two to place the conference's decisions before the Russian Government and later before the American President. Nkrumah flew to

⁴ His favourite fruit was the melon. Every time he came to breakfast Nehru collected the best for him.

Moscow with Nehru in the same plane. In order to insure a proper reception to Nkrumah,⁵ Nehru asked one of his aides to lead him down the gangway first, so that he could be informally but appropriately received by Russian leaders and conveyed to the hotel. Nehru took this precaution lest the President of Ghana should feel slighted, if he followed in the Prime Minister of India's entourage. Dr Nkrumah deemed this an insult and never excused Nehru for the "slight". President Nasser gave one the impression of dignity and dedication. He was not subtle, but dynamic, unlike General Naguib before him who was subtle but ineffective. He carried himself like a soldier, and spoke as an Arab. He insisted on making his speech at the U.N. in Arabic, thus breaking new ground for Arab countries. What he lacked in subtlety, he made up in courage.

Dr Soekarno was glamorous. When I met him in Jakarta in 1951, he stood out as a resolute fighter for his country's independence, and a leader of his people. But when I met him at the U.N. he seemed to have suddenly dwarfed. His colourful uniforms contrasted unfavourably with the sober dignity of dark suits around him. Baton in hand, he almost looked like a prosperous band-leader. There was something grotesque and amusing about his exhibitionism. Before making his formal speech from the rostrum he sent an official request to Dag Hammerskjold to permit him to station two aides around him, one to hold the manuscript and the other to hold the pages after they had been read. The King of Jordan was the only other one to make a similar request. In his case he wanted his six-foot, two-hundred-and-forty-pound chief body-guard to be stationed behind him when he made his speech. Both requests were refused.

Referring to bodyguards, almost all heads of State had brought with them security men from their own countries. When Nehru arrived the Federal security chief went into the plane and asked if the Prime Minister had brought any bodyguards. "Frankly no," said Nehru smiling. "I have brought

⁵ Nehru's visit was formal and official.

the body. Now you can supply the guard if you like," he added. At one of the parties I told Dr Soekarno that he had not changed at all since I met him ten years earlier. "That is not a compliment," he said in his improvised English, "An Indonesian is happy only when he is told that he is looking ten years younger to what he looked ten years ago." Saying this he went down on one knee, spread his other leg and pirouetted, attracting some lady guests who looked amused and enchanted. Events had helped Soekarno to achieve greatness but he did not have the capacity or the ability to sustain that greatness.

There is one thing which Latin American politicians shared in common with their Indian counterparts—an endless capacity for speech-making. Once a Latin American took the floor at the U.N., you could go out, take lunch, and come back, to find the same speaker holding the floor, and also perhaps elaborating the same argument. Dr Castro of Cuba, however, was different. Dressed in the same uniform he wore in the Bay of Pigs, standing six feet and more in his jack boots, his beard lending roughness to his soft, almost feminine features, he looked like a Robin Hood or a Robinson Crusoe striding into the World Assembly. He had already become a legendary personality. His companions had many stories to tell of his fortitude, daring and dedication. Castro and his entourage had reserved two floors in my hotel. When he arrived, thousands lined the footpaths—his admirers yelling "Fidel! Give them Hell! !!" and his opponents taking up the refrain "Fi-Del, go to Hell!"

One day my Committee had adjourned a little late in the evening. As I was entering the delegates' lounge I found Dr Castro sitting astride a mountain of air bags and suit cases. "They have turned me out of the hotel," he said plaintively. "I propose to stay here, till Hammerskjold or someone settles the dispute." He later moved to Hotel Theresa in Harlem. When some Pressmen asked him why Nehru, an elder statesman, should have gone to meet Castro in Harlem, Nehru with characteristic nonchalance remarked, "I will travel round the

world, if need be, to shake the hands of a brave man". From then onwards Castro regarded Nehru as "Uncle". The dramatic tantrums of a hero and his spartan austerity apart, Castro had no equal in oratory even among Latin Americans. His major speech lasted four hours. In Cuba, his speeches lasted six to seven hours. I could attend only one. The audiences ran into hundreds of thousands. In between pauses he bent his head, closed his eyes, and when the audience thought he was asleep, he would suddenly rise and roar like a lion. His words spelt lightning and thunder.

Living in New York in the early 'sixties gave one just a faint, if also a realistic, concept of what life under the threat of an atomic war could mean—leave aside atomic war as such. All over the city several thousand feet deep underground shelters had been built, supposedly proof against nuclear "fall out" and radiation. The shelters had to have sufficient supplies of oxygen, and large quantities of preserved food to last the occupants several days, till whatever was left of the outside world was clear of atomic radiation and fall out. The Civil defence authorities had circulated elaborate precautions against atomic radiation. The description of what could happen under atomic radiation made one's skin creep. Sprawled all over the countryside, instead of auto-junk yards, one now saw on display atomic shelters for private homes of various sizes and prices with anti-radiation containers for water and foodstuffs, anti-radiation garments and what not. Each shelter looked like a rat-hole by human dimensions.

Nehru like many others at the time realized that, by reducing tensions, by enlarging the area of understanding between nations, and by building up if possible a bridge of understanding between the Eastern and Western countries, war could be avoided, or at least deferred. The great silent part Nehru played in 1960 to prevent hostilities breaking out between U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. over Cuba is hitherto little known. One purpose Khrushchev had in travelling by boat to New York was to proceed later to Cuba after his mission in the U.S.A. was over. It was well known at the time that IBM

missile sights had been built in Cuba, and anti-ballistic missiles had been sighted on their way to Havana. Castro meanwhile had called upon the U.S.A. to remove all military personnel and military installations from the Quantano base in Cuba. Russia had supported that demand. A year earlier Eisenhower during a visit to the Middle East, at Nehru's request, had paid a brief unexpected visit to India. India was then having trouble with the Chinese. This timely gesture had a great effect on Nehru. In 1960, even though the relations between Eisenhower and Khrushchev were strained, Nehru successfully persuaded Khrushchev to withdraw the anti-ballistic missiles from Cuba, and also to cancel his visit to Havana. It was almost midnight when this decision was communicated to Castro. Castro, a terribly emotional man, broke into tears. "They will destroy me. They will destroy Cuba," he said, holding fast to Nehru and Khrushchev, addressing them as Uncles. "Promise me that you will both come to Cuba's help if this happens. Promise—Promise," he said. They both promised and assured him that America had no intention of destroying him or Cuba.

45

Goa and the “Bay of Pigs”

John F. Kennedy, like Nehru, was born rich, and like him had lived ever since childhood close to the whirlwind of politics. Referring to his father's wealth during his election campaign for Presidentship, Kennedy said he had received an SOS from his father—"Dear Jack: Don't buy a single vote more than is necessary. I will be damned if I am going to pay for a landslide." Like Nehru, greatness came to him at a very young age. He was elected President of the United States almost at the very age at which Nehru was first elected President of the Indian National Congress. Like Nehru, Kennedy was an expert actor, a man of many moods, many smiles, and many grimaces. While both delighted in making speeches, against Nehru's slow-motion, wayward style Kennedy fired off facts, figures, quotations and a lot of condensed brilliance with the speed of a machine gun. Both had the reputation of patronising the arts. But their tastes were not in the "high brow" category. One could chance to hear Schubert and Frank Sinatra in the White House as much as Ravi Shanker and the Bhangra in Tin Murti. It was not unexpected that Nehru and Kennedy should have felt like kindred spirits.

If Kennedy had been President when he first met Nehru,¹ or Nehru been a younger man, or if both had been destined to live longer than they did after their historic meeting,² their joint contribution to the solution of some of the perplexing

¹ In 1951.

² In 1961.

international problems would have been momentous. Destiny had however dictated otherwise. When they met, Kennedy did not remind Nehru, although he had not forgotten, how the latter in 1951 had treated him with the indifference one shows to an inquisitive schoolboy. Before the interview had entered the tenth minute,³ Nehru started looking at the roof, his eyes mystically half open and half closed; indicating to the visitor that he was not interested in what was being said. In 1961, friendly words coming from "President Kennedy" acted like a balm, after all the arrogance of Dulles and the impertinences of Herter his successor. It was not merely what Kennedy did or said that changed completely Nehru's attitude to the United States, but also the way he said or did things without giving one the impression either of being pushed or being patronised. Jacqueline Kennedy left a deep impression on Nehru. He was particularly touched by the keen interest she displayed in his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who accompanied him on this occasion. She even offered Indira the services of her own French hair dresser, whose magic touch took away ten years from her looks and made her at the time a press sensation in Washington. The French in Jacqueline only added to her charms. When Kennedy pleaded lack of time to visit India, Nehru extended a cordial invitation to Jacqueline. Jacqueline's brief informal visit cemented further the understanding that had developed between Nehru and Kennedy. Nehru allowed her the informality of staying in a small cottage near the house of Galbraith, the American Ambassador, in my neighbourhood. He gave her a great deal of time and attention. As one of the writers observed, "Nehru was much more himself than he had been in Newport or Washington." In fact he made a more telling impression on her than the pompous Ayub Khan of Pakistan. As for Kennedy, the fact that the Indian Prime Minister occasionally dozed off in the midst of conversation, or through an opera number, or gave a look of philosophic blankness when discussing subjects like

³ Schlesinger.

Congo or Cuba, left Kennedy with the sad feeling that Nehru was a spent force.

We who spoke to Nehru after their meetings carried the impression that in Kennedy, Nehru had found an understanding friend. Kennedy, however, was disappointed. The Nehru of ten years ago, the neutral force he had hoped to win over to the positive defense of "new frontiers", he confided to friends, had lost his dynamism and vitality. He seemed to him now more aggressive in speech than in action.

Nehru avoided controversial subjects, but Indira probed the President about Krishna Menon. Kennedy considered Menon the "Dulles of neutralism". What hurt Americans, he said, was not whether he was a Socialist or a Communist, but the anti-American slant in the views he expressed. What Kennedy said during these intimate meetings about Krishna Menon had a great effect on Nehru. Krishna Menon had been excluded from these talks. On arrival in New York after the meetings, and before he left for Mexico on his next official visit, Nehru was manifestly cold towards V.K.K. Krishna Menon stood at the airport aloof. I remarked that while in America this show of estrangement could help, in India this may adversely affect Menon's election, which was in the offing. "But what can I do?" Nehru replied. "He is hopeless sometimes. At times he does not even behave like a grown-up." Before leaving, and after having shaken hands with all who had collected, in the grand manner of which Nehru alone was capable, the Prime Minister swept up to Menon, put his arm around him, and proceeded with him up the gangway, whispering inanities, but in "confidence". "My enemies have been slinging mud," Menon said to me soon after Nehru's departure. "This happens to everyone of whom people get jealous," I remarked in return. "Yes, but a lot of this mud sticks." As later events showed, a lot of this mud did stick and Menon's apprehensions were correct.

Kennedy soon after becoming President burnt his fingers in a mad adventure against Castro in the "Bay of Pigs". It was an ill-conceived and grossly mismanaged operation. When

I visited Cuba for the anniversary celebrations of Castro's Government, one haunting fear was shared by everyone in the towns, in the farms and even at the deserted seaside beaches—the fear of an imminent military coup sponsored by the United States. The much feared and much talked of attack finally came, not in December, but in April. The architect of the attack was Allan Dulles, head of the F.B.I., probably ghost-guided by his deceased brother, John Foster Dulles. At the Bay of Pigs a motley expeditionary force consisting of Batistados, Cuban deserters, exiled professors and doctors, notorious criminals and mercenaries got into landing crafts and made for the beach heads, buoyed by the fervent hope that, soon after landing, American air attacks would clear the way for them, para-troops would rain from the sky, and many fifth-column uprisings behind the Castro lines will start all over the country. Instead Castro, who had been keeping careful watch, moved in with twenty thousand Fidelestos, tanks and artillery encircling the invaders. The American air attack did not materialize. Castro's Russian MIGs rained terror on the beachhead. The fifth columns never showed up. "Even if you by any chance fail, you can always move into the nearby mountains, and later start guerrilla attacks," the C.I.A. experts had counselled. Evidently no one had carefully scanned the maps. Between the mountains and the Bay of Pigs there lay eighty miles of marshy death traps. Thus the last Dulles enterprise and the first Kennedy adventure ended in dismal disaster.

The other incident occurred on the West Coast of India. On the night of December 17-18, 1961, three columns of the Indian Army, under air cover and with artillery support moved into Goa. On the morning of the 18th the report reached New York. The report led to conflicting responses and varying moods—of elation, commotion and confusion—among the different delegations, including our own. The NATO experts freely declared that India had taken a great risk. The Portuguese army, they had been informed, was equipped with the latest weapons, had the support of a powerful Navy and a

competent Air Force, and that for "every single Portuguese, India will have to lose ten men. This took no account of the hundreds of thousands of Goans who supported Portugal to a man." The most depressed and doubt-ridden amongst us was our own permanent representative. He felt that before such an action was taken, he should at least have been informed and properly briefed. He even shared the view that a military and diplomatic blunder had been committed. One of our own delegates, an M.P., suggested our sending to Nehru a joint cable protesting against the military action which was "opposed to Gandhiji's teachings and in violation of the principles of non-violence". Like all sanctimonious humbugs, when convinced of a spiritual approach he seemed to be in a frenzy. I told him to shut up. It was different, however, when I entered the fourth Committee.⁴ One by one, representatives of almost all the Afro-Asian countries and of the Soviet bloc walked up and offered their heartiest congratulations. Some even jubilantly suggested that the Committee be adjourned to celebrate "Goa Day". The infection spread.

An urgent meeting of the Security Council met at nine in the night. By then it was hoped some news might trickle through and delegates could know "a little more of the disaster" awaiting Indian forces. When Adlai Stevenson was pillorying India for treating the Charter as a scrap of paper and the U.N. with contempt, our Permanent Representative was not in his seat. Millions of Americans heard Stevenson censuring India, and saw on television, at the same time, the chair of India's representative empty. As the debate closed there was no one to reply to the American indictment. But Stevenson looked like a fool the day after. It was past midnight that the Prime Minister of India was telling us on long distance: "Our forces have gone deep into Goa. They are still

⁴ Committee on Colonialism. The head of the Ceylon Mission, Malasekra, was a member of the Security Council. He asked me to help him prepare his speech for the evening meeting. I spent a few hours helping to prepare the text. His was the speech of the day. As against the NATO attack, led by Adlai Stevenson, ours was a poor, conventional performance, an indictment without life or punch, a defence without conviction.

on the move. This has all been unexpected. We never believed they could go so far in such a short time. They have met very little resistance."

Next day news came through that Goa had fallen to Indian forces. It happened on the same day that I had a long-standing lunch engagement with Toby Durdin, the Editor-in-charge of the Asian desk of *The New York Times*. I found Toby was not alone. He had with him Herbert Mathews, then one of the star writers of *The New York Times*, Freedman, the News Editor, and two others. As I arrived one of the Editors disclosed that according to "Portuguese sources", Indian forces were under heavy fire from Portuguese ships, and were likely to be bottled up. My hosts started sympathising. A quarter of an hour later the news came of the surrender of Goa, practically without casualties. I was the one then to offer drinks. It was Herbert Mathews who did the summing up. "After the ugly bloody mess the British made in the Suez, the French in Algeria, the Russians in Hungary, and we in the Bay of Pigs, India," he said, "is no longer an exception, except that it has done a cleaner and neater job than any of the rest."

In India Nehru declared,⁵ "Nothing has happened in India since Independence fourteen and a half years ago which has excited and thrilled India so much as the liberation of Goa." Kennedy had earlier promised to employ his good offices with the Portuguese. His grievance now was that the action should have taken place within a month of his last meeting with Nehru and a few days after his ambassador in India, Ken Galbraith, had asked for a six-month period for a negotiated departure of the Portuguese. Menon as Defence Minister was intensely happy, as this feather in his cap came a few weeks before the general elections and contributed greatly to his thumping success. Once again,⁶ the country voted the Congress into power with an overwhelming majority; and Nehru as the Prime Minister of India. The Congress ~~wit~~ now ran from Kanya Kumari to Kashmir, and from Panjim to Kohima.

⁵ Press Conference, December 28, 1961: *Speeches*, vol. 4, p. 35.

⁶ February, 1962.

The Vegetarian Tiger

The British attached great importance to equipping and training the Indian Army and building it up according to the best soldierly traditions. The Indian Army under them had built up a grand reputation for discipline, courage and efficiency. Indian officers and soldiers were next to none in the art of war and military manœuvre.

Nehru and his associates however had their own ideas about defence. "The right approach to defence," he said, "is to avoid having unfriendly relations with other countries." Nehru genuinely believed that no quarrel was so big as to require war to settle it. "To put it differently, war today," he said, "is, and ought to be, out of the question."¹ Nehru and his colleagues therefore concerned themselves more with establishing control over the defence services, in changing their mercenary outlook into a patriotic obligation, than in pampering them or unduly boosting their importance in national life.

In the early years, except for Kashmir and Hyderabad, there was little or no fighting to be done. Civilian conflicts were few and far between. One of the major duties of soldiers was to provide a guard of honour to visiting and local dignitaries. These included ministers and even deputy ministers. The Army arranged and led funerals, provided bands at weddings, or presented colourful parades on national days. If there was a water famine in Rajasthan, the Army provided mobile water

¹ Speech, March 21, 1956.

supply units. Army men were ordered to help in rescue work in floods and earthquakes. They were posted at cinemas during command performances attended by the President and the Prime Minister. They guarded cricket fields and stadiums. Once a General who had been asked to provide soldiers to act as ushers at a show said sarcastically, "Except for caring for the urinals and lavatories, we have soldiers doing every other job."

The leaders had good reason to feel cautious about the Army becoming power-conscious. In many newly freed countries Army officers had, through coups d'état or otherwise, established dictatorships which had only the sanction of the sword. In Bangkok, coups d'état were being staged periodically like comic operas. In Egypt, King Farouk had been ousted through a military coup. In Burma, Thakin Nu had been replaced by General Ne Win. In Pakistan, the first Prime Minister, Nawabzade Liaquat Ali Khan, had been murdered. General Sikander Mirza, who headed the first military government, was later forced out through an Army coup followed by the dictator ship of another army officer, Col. and later Field Marshal Ayub Khan.²

The first Indian to assume charge as Commander-in-Chief of the Army was General Cariappa. He was a forthright, hard-boiled soldier, brought up in the best British Army traditions. There was nothing conspiratorial or dictatorial about him. He was respected by the officers and his men. He resented interference by civilians in matters relating to the services. Cariappa did not react cordially to the political domination of the "dhotie". He felt some of the new sartorial conventions irksome, and in discord with British-fostered traditions. In a mood of frustration, addressing a Rotary Club in Madras, he expressed himself critically of the Government.³ This was enough to emphasise the already existing suspicions about the Army. The post of Commander-in-Chief was abolished. To

² In 1969 Ayub Khan was replaced by General Yahya Khan.

³ He suggested in 1970 the take-over of the government by parliamentary consent by the Army, to restore law and order. This, again, created a commotion.

neutralize the three wings, the Army, the Air Force and the Navy were put on an equal status.

Baldev Singh, the first Defence Minister, was an easy-going, playful individual. He was chosen Defence Minister more for communal reasons than because of any special aptitude for the job. After the death of Baldev Singh, one Defence Minister followed another. They were chosen more to plug a political hole than because of their training, experience or aptitude. Pandit Katju had been an eminent lawyer, but with age he had lost the capacity for making decisions. He was by nature inclined to be soft. He would not harm a fly. Fortunately, his stay as Defence Minister was brief. He was followed by Gopalaswamy Iyengar. Gopalaswami, a vegetarian Brahmin from the South, was a competent civil servant, but not of the stuff of which Army leaders are made. Even then he would have done well if he had stayed longer, or at his age if he had not to divide his time between Defence, Home, Communications and Railways. In fact he directed Defence affairs only in abstentia. Nehru himself became Defence Minister twice for short intervals. This again only to fill up temporary vacancies.

V. K. Krishna Menon served as Defence Minister the longest. He was, by all standards, a square peg in a round hole. He was like a peacock being employed to hunt a panther. Although ferocious in speech, defiant in controversy and obstinate by nature, he was a sort of vegetarian tiger who could snarl at the meek but tremble at the sight of blood. Besides he divided his time between Defence, Foreign Affairs and the United Nations, Defence being third in priority. He preferred foreign assignments more than a static life in Delhi. Even then Krishna Menon was the first one to give to the department a lot of his brain and energies. He did some wonderful things. But he also did a great deal of damage. He introduced for the first time politics and the personal equation in the ranks of the defence services.⁴ It was bad enough that in the two decades

⁴ General Catriapa, the first Indian Commander-in-Chief, explaining some of the reverses suffered by the Indian Army against the Chinese in NEFA in 1963, remarked, "I am afraid a certain amount of 'politics' was allowed

following Independence there should have been as many as ten Defence Ministers and most of them on a part-time basis. It was worse for the army to loose through normal retirement and otherwise, in the same period, as many as three dozen top Commanders, some of whom could serve as Army Chiefs only for short periods and some who would have made excellent chiefs, but for their early retirement. Krishna Menon loved intrigue and preferred favourites. Thimmayya, who succeeded Rajendra Singh, found that junior men were being promoted to senior positions and favourites were being offered prize jobs. Even the political leanings of officers were taken into account in choosing them for certain appointments. Thimmayya offered to resign.⁵

The Department of Defence was controlling nearly twelve large ordnance factories. Some of these were more than a hundred years old. Under Menon the Defence Ministry took in hand the renovation of these factories. To the existing twelve were added four more with the latest and more sophisticated machinery for the production of medium tanks, small arms, rifles, high explosives, ammunition shells, gun carriages, etc. If Menon had left their management to experts, and had kept his personality, his preferences and prejudices strictly out of the picture, the achievements would have been miraculous. If again he had not sought favourites even among experts, but sought the most capable talent, the success would have been more diversified.

I was in London in 1958 on my way to New York. Menon

to get into the Army which did a great deal of harm to the spirit of loyalty and discipline amongst some of the higher ranks.... This should not have been allowed to happen at all." (*Organizer*, Nov. 4, 1963).

⁵I had known a large number of senior and junior Army Officers during my professional life. I never met anyone who proclaimed himself either to be a "rightist" or a "leftist". During the Defence Ministership of Menon, there was a rash of leftist talk among officers, and open avowal of leftist beliefs. One of these became a General without commanding a regiment or without any active war experience. His great achievements were building army homes in record time, arranging stage plays and entertainment for the troops, or otherwise conspicuously engaging himself in literary activities.

very kindly asked me to accompany him to the Farnborough Air Show. With us were a Major General and an Air Vice-Marshal.⁶ They and Vice-Admiral Shankar then constituted the triumvirate of top technical talent in the Defence Services. I learnt that these experts were going specially to study the performance of the AVRO, which it was proposed to manufacture in India. At Farnborough we saw some of the most modern jet fighters, heavy bombers, etc. etc. We also saw the AVRO. To me it seemed intended more for civilian purposes than for defence. "That is exactly the idea," remarked the Air Vice-Marshal. "If we decide on the AVRO, it will be as useful for the internal air services as for the army." Menon not only endorsed this view, but disclosed that the IAC were thinking of buying Fokker Friendships from Holland, which would be a wasteful investment if the AVRO could be manufactured in India. I however learnt from other experts that the AVRO on display was a lighter and more capacious plane. What British collaborators wanted to manufacture in India was the AVRO 647, which had become obsolete. I also learnt that the "Fokker Friendship" was any day a better passenger plane. "But," said the second expert, "if we succeed in obtaining sanction for the AVRO then the Fokker scheme goes." The tragedy was that for reasons of their own, the Army decided to manufacture the AVRO, and IAC invested funds in importing Fokker Friendships. As we were driving back to our hotel, the experts were proudly detailing the several items they had succeeded in manufacturing—such as coolers, stoves, thermos flasks, coffee percolators, flashlight batteries, radio sets, etc. These they claimed could sell at very competitive prices in the open market. I later queried Menon: "Why instead of coffee percolators, can't the factories produce more modern, sophisticated arms, or is it that they have produced enough?" Menon evaded a clear answer and merely remarked: "Don't you worry about our defence needs. We are manufacturing many more items than ever before. What we

⁶ Maj.-Gen. Partap Narain, Air Vice-Marshal Harjinder Singh.

are manufacturing for the common consumer is only to occupy idle capacity."

If these men had concentrated more on modernizing army equipment, in manufacturing armour and ammunition, rather than stoves and radio sets, and in thinking less of the consumer and more of the soldier and his needs, they would have later saved the country from disaster. They were not solely to blame. They were guided by the Cabinet's general assumption that India had no enemies and that the Army at best could be required for internal purposes or for unforeseen emergencies. Then there was the Cabinet's political apprehension that a large, unduly well-equipped defence force could encourage fascist tendencies and become a danger to democracy. It was never fully realised, till it became too late, that India had not only one, but two formidable and unscrupulous enemies, that India had an exposed land frontier of three thousand miles vulnerable to these enemies, and more than four thousand miles of undefended seashore. The Cabinet, more than even the Defence Ministry, did not take into account the fact that the two belligerent neighbours, while employing cunning and diplomacy to camouflage their sinister designs, were building up a massive striking force, equipping themselves with the most sophisticated modern arms, including the latest bombers and fighters. They were preparing for a zero hour of their choice.

Pakistan made no secret of its faith in violence or of the fact that India alone was the enemy against whom its military strength had to be measured. Its earlier aggression against Kashmir was repulsed, resulting in an unstable cease-fire. But in the bargain it occupied one-third of the territory of Kashmir, and was still in its illegal occupation. Far from feeling repentant, its first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan openly and defiantly declared that Pakistan had adopted the "mukka", the big fist, as its national symbol, and proposed to pursue the policy of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" towards India. Pakistan had entered into a military pact with the United States and its allies, offering strategic bases in exchange

for arms,⁷ only to strengthen its fighting power against India.

Red China's regular army in 1955 was estimated at 170 divisions of 12,000 men each. This was backed by a doctrinated militia estimated at ten millions. It had acquired from the Soviet Union a large number of tanks, jet fighters and bombers. China was then in the process of manufacturing large quantities of its own small arms. Chinese nuclear scientists who had received training in the United States were known to be engaged in manufacturing nuclear arms, and their experiments in the preparation of an atom bomb had reached an advanced stage.⁸ While at one time Indian Generals claimed that one Indian soldier was equal to ten Chinese, the Korean conflict had shown the average Chinese to be a hardy, adaptable and resourceful soldier. The Chinese Generals, besides, now excelled in the new tactics of massive troop deployment and quick manoeuvre. Unlike the Indian soldiers who had inherited British traditions, the Chinese had learnt to fight light, even to supplement daily needs locally, and to dispense with elaborate supplies.

Those in charge of Indian defence had not made any serious assessment of the joint fighting potential of Pakistan and China. They never even dreamt that India would have to confront them as her joint enemies. It was all along felt by policy-shapers at the top that, although Pakistan was being supplied with millions of dollars of the latest and most sophisticated arms as part of America's military aid, these arms would never be allowed to be used against India. They had received solemn assurances on paper, from as high an authority as the President, that if ever Pakistan attacked India, America would

⁷ In the course of a decade or more, Pakistan had received more than Rs. 750 crores worth of military equipment, which included more than 400 Patton Tanks, the best in the world, more than two hundred fighters and bombers including canberras, F-106 A Starfighters, Sabre jets, C-130 B Hercules, a large number of troop carriers and reconnaissance planes, etc.

⁸ China actually exploded its first atom bomb in 1965 and reportedly its hydrogen bomb in 1967. In 1968, according to an estimate given by experts, it could manufacture up to 40 bombs a year and other weapons with nuclear warheads.

not permit the use of these arms "under any circumstances".

As for China, despite her growing military strength, Indian policy-makers looked upon it ever since Bandung as a friend and not as a potential enemy. Even after China's occupation of Tibet, they hoped to settle any likely disputes by friendly discussion. Speaking in the General Assembly,⁹ Krishna Menon said, "We have been happy in our relations with China.... We have a long 3000 miles frontier with China and we have no armies on that frontier.... We have waged no wars, so far as we know, in the whole of history. If we who are on the frontiers of China, and who would therefore have the most to lose, felt that we were bringing into the comity of nations a country that would be likely to break the law, we would be the first to stand up and say so." It was not he alone, but the whole Cabinet¹⁰ that had misjudged events. They did not show even the common man's awareness of the menace which Pakistan and China posed to India's frontiers till danger knocked at the very door.

⁹ In support of a motion asking for the admission of China to the U.N (U.N Records, November 16, 1957)

¹⁰ With the solitary exception of Vallabhbhai Patel who had given many warnings about China's expansionist designs and had expressed deep distrust of China.

The Purge

Funda, a member of the primitive tribes, came from his village, Neemkada, with an application for the allotment of cultivable land. Underneath the application was hidden a one-rupee note. The Deputy Minister for Revenue asked the meaning of it all. Funda offered another fifty *naye paisa* to the Minister explaining that he had been told that he could not get anything done unless he was prepared to offer a bribe.¹ Soon after becoming Prime Minister, Nehru had threatened "to hang hoarders, profiteers and black-marketeers by the nearest lamp-post".² Time had shown that Nehru was as unrealistic in his threats as he was over-optimistic in his promises. In fact, no man saw corruption grow around him so helplessly as Nehru did. A congress Chief Minister at this time publicly boasted that with fifty lakhs one could become a Chief Minister, and with a crore one could buy one's way to Prime Ministership!

Nehru's confidence was rudely shaken when the first bomb exploded virtually under his own desk. M. O. Mathai was his trusted Secretary. He knew more secrets than members of the Cabinet. As a result of an inquiry it was revealed that "friends" had donated "several lakhs" to a "trust" Mathai had founded in the name of his "revered mother". A big house in a fashionable quarter in the capital and an orchard in the hills had been offered as gifts to keep the memory of the pious lady alive and evergreen. Mathai had to resign. At this very

¹ U.N.I. Report, September 6, 1966.

² Organizer, December 16, 1963.

time the adventures of one Mundra led to the resignation of T. T. Krishnamachari.

As time passed, Nehru had more shocks in store for him. Keshav Dev Malaviya was a friend of half a century. He was a confirmed leftist. He was gifted with more than average intelligence. He was Minister for Mines. Some of the most paying mines were in Orissa. Serajuddin, an Orissa merchant, was interested in manganese. Manganese was very much in demand abroad, especially in the U.S.A. Since manganese mines were Government-controlled, the more concessions one got, the more manganese one could exploit. Serajuddin started establishing a Manganese lobby both at the Centre and in Orissa. Serajuddin himself was a short, unassuming, carelessly dressed individual. Serajuddin did not keep his official records carefully, but he recorded in his private diary, with meticulous care, all that he spent on gifts, presents and cash offerings to his various benefactors with their names and addresses. When the Police made surprise raids at different places, quite a few of the entries in the Serajuddin diary found corroboration. They found the cars, the refrigerators, the whisky bottles and other items as listed by Serajuddin with the recipients. S. K. Das, a Judge of the Supreme Court, held an inquiry. He could "not clear K.D.". Malaviya resigned.

Whispers became louder and louder about the adventures of the Kairon family. After years of trial and error with mediocrities in the Punjab, Nehru had for the first time found in Kairon³ a "progressive, capable, dynamic Chief Minister". Under Kairon Punjab made rapid progress, industrially, educationally and in agriculture. While Kairon had done wonders as an administrator, his sons, it was alleged, had achieved miracles in amassing wealth through questionable means. They had also become a terror for officials who would not toe their line. Justice S. K. Das held Pratap Singh Kairon responsible for conniving at the doings of his sons, relatives and government officials, and for having abused his influence and powers to

³ Pratap Singh Kairon.

help the members of his family, acquire and dispose of vast properties and businesses.⁴

Up to 1947, in the top leadership of the Congress there were only a few with affluent means, or with children possessing extraordinary talent. By 1957 it was difficult to meet a Congressman of influence or standing who was still poor. Most had become affluent. As for the children, those who had not succeeded in setting up lucrative businesses had secured prize jobs out of the reach of some of the ablest young men of obscure parentage. If a census was taken, it would have been found that birth had played a very important part in the choice of candidates for top jobs in government and business, and family pulls were given priority over ability and experience. Pretty women exercised more influence than intelligent women, and whether it was a favour, a job, a contract or a licence, a captivating feminine face could achieve sometimes even more than money.

As reports of graft and corruption began to multiply, Nehru felt more and more concerned. As an Opposition Member of Parliament, referring to allegations of corruption, suggestively said, "Congress leaders once had the gift of the gab. Now they have developed the gift of the grab."⁵ Every enquiry showed that illicit wealth amassed by several Ministers and their families ran not into lakhs but into crores. In one State it was discovered that some of the top Ministers and their wives had

⁴The Das Report was a five-hundred-page document which detailed the adventures of Kairon's sons, who built cinemas, acquired control of brick kilns, exchanged properties, infringed the law with impunity, and became millionaires, while Kairon strove hard, in loose pyjamas, badly tailored shirts and slovenly jackets to make the Punjab a show-piece among the States of India.

⁵Kripalani, a former president of the Indian National Congress, warned that "corruption at all levels jeopardised democracy in India". He said further, "Corruption which had formed a place for itself deep in the hearts and minds of Congressmen is telling on our national character." Referring to some recent disclosures, he said, "The charges of corruption against the Ministers in Kerala, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh by Congressmen themselves has shown that the extent of corruption was far greater than was the case in the Punjab." Finally, Kripalani "accused the Congress of debasing public character". (Press Report, September 19, 1964).

been operating jointly, treating the administration as a corporation.

After months of sober thinking, Nehru finally acted. In the process he immortalized another honest but comparatively obscure colleague, Shri Kamaraj Nadar, the popular Chief Minister of Madras. I set eyes on Shri Kamaraj for the first time in a fashionable restaurant. His rough and robust demeanour, his homely dress, his unconventional way of eating rice, somehow did not fit in with the décolleté environment. But nonetheless anyone meeting him could feel that he was forthright, honest and had the tenacity and the purity of an uncut diamond. He struck me as a man of few words, but possessed of a lot of action.

When Nehru disclosed to Kamaraj his dilemma and his feeling that something drastic, something spectacular and something spontaneous required to be done, Kamaraj suggested a major surgical operation. While Nehru later generously attributed to Kamaraj the authorship of the final plan, it was the subtle mind of Nehru himself which gave to the proposed operation the noble appearance of a grand "renunciation". The operation affected many top Congressmen who had lingered in positions of power too long. Some of them were being openly accused of corruption. Others had a fine record of service.

In November 1963, the Congress Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. met to implement the so-called "Kamaraj Plan". Nehru told his colleagues that since many of the best men had been occupied too long with ministerial duties, party work had suffered, and the hold of the Congress on the people had weakened. The time, he said, had therefore come for some of them to volunteer to renounce office and take up party work "to clean up the Congress and prepare it for achieving its great national objectives". Nehru offered to be the first to relinquish office, since he had "borne the burden of office" the longest. This plea, as planned, was unanimously rejected. In order that people may not be able to distinguish between the "black sheep and the white sheep", the two to follow next were

reputed to be the most honest of the lot, Shri Kamaraj and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Modest and unassuming, Lal Bahadur had spent most of his adult life in the service of the country. For several years he had served as a Minister in the United Provinces, and had made a name for himself for integrity, robust commonsense, and sound judgment. When he was Minister for Railways in the Union Cabinet, one serious accident followed another. He was so conscientious about his responsibilities that he immediately resigned. This had never happened before, or for that matter afterwards, although railway accidents have been and continue to be a periodic feature.

After these two, followed others, some willingly, others reluctantly and quite a few under powerful private pressure. It seemed like King Arthur was presiding over the voluntary dissolution of the "Knights of the Round Table". The "black sheep" and the "white sheep" were bundled together. The whole thing was made to look like an act of grand sacrifice! To ensure that those who were quitting made no attempt to return, Shastri announced "one thing is fairly certain. None of us who quit office is going to resume office soon".⁶

As a result of this "purge", Gulzari Lal Nanda, who was fairly junior in the Cabinet, became Home Minister. He unexpectedly jumped up to the seniormost position in Nehru's Cabinet. To Nandaji as Home Minister fell the task of waging war against corruption.

It was at this time that I received a summons from Nandaji to meet him and a few others, to help in making a success of his crusade.⁷ In utmost sincerity but in the language of indiscreet bravado, Nandaji had solemnly pledged, in one of his

⁶ Morarji Desai soon after quitting office, addressing the Congress Councillors in Delhi (Dec. 19, 1963) said, "The Congress would die if Congressmen did not mend their ways. Corruption, nepotism, and favouritism had brought the organisation into disrepute, and the evil was spreading. If this was not checked in time, the Congress would perish...and the coming generations would 'spit' at our name for our misdeeds."

⁷ We met in a small room adjoining the northwing of the Central Secretariat, and set up a sort of Council of War, to implement Nandaji's

broadcasts, that if he did not eradicate corruption in two years, he would quit office. It was evident that most of the evils that at that time debased public life and fouled the administration were traceable to political wire-pulling at top levels. If Nandaji could make an example of some of the top politicians, I told him, took severe action against a few of the corrupt Secretariat officials in high places, and dealt strongly with some of the big hoarders, profiteers and black-marketeers, "the battle would be won".

Nandaji assured us that more than thirty cases of corruption had already been completed by the C.B.I. against top Ministers and several against Secretaries and departmental heads. Seeing how earnest Nandaji was in carrying out his pledge, we all decided to carry the holy grail with him. Our mushroom organization attracted more attention than it deserved. Complaints about graft against politicians and officials began pouring in. Enthused by the remarkable public response, Nandaji decided to set up a "complaints and grievances" wing at his own residence, so that cases could be dealt with "expeditiously". In specially pitched tents and spacious marquees, officials of the Home Ministry, and members of the Samiti sat together screening complaints, hearing grievances, and passing them on for "quick action". Such was the extent of corruption all round and so small was our organization that we even evoked ridicule. Nandaji was likened to Don Quixote tilting against the windmills of corruption and we as the faithful Sancho Panzas helping in the effort. One paper published the story of an aggrieved businessman who had gone to the Home Minister's house to complain about some officers who were asking for bribes. Finding the queue very long, and his patience exhausted, he went up to a seemingly influential "babu",⁸ pulled out a ten-rupee note, pushed it into his shirt pocket, and said, "I will give you ten rupees more if you can get me to see

pledge. This body was later named rather pompously "Samyukta Sadachar Samiti". The Home Ministry set up Vigilance Commissions. The Samiti was to mobilise non-official support.

⁸ Official.

Nandaji alone." The unconventionally dressed "babu" happened to be Nandaji himself.

Soon ridicule turned into admiration. Inquiries into allegations of corruption against three Chief Ministers and some junior Ministers led to astounding disclosures. The police discovered smuggling rackets involving high customs officials, influential politicians and diplomats. They netted foreigners who had employed a fleet of private planes and sea-boats to smuggle gold and foreign liquor and merchandise. The amount involved ran into crores. Nandaji became a hero. His political stock rocketted high. He became closest to the Prime Minister. Nandaji felt so confident at the grand impact his war against corruption was making that at a national convention⁹ he solemnly declared that his pledge to eradicate corruption from public life would be achieved not in two years but within six months!

Those among his political colleagues who had first ridiculed his pledge, and had later sniffed at his efforts, now began to feel concerned about his activities. His colleagues now started accusing him in private of trying to pave his way to Nehru's successorship by posing as the only saint among sinners. A few like Mrs Gandhi declared that while his insane campaign might net a few guilty ones, it was sure to disfigure and damage the public image of the Congress. "Stop this character assassination". many of the concerned ones pleaded with Nehru. By the end of 1964 Nandaji was a sadder but a wiser man. Corruption had reacted back and overpowered him. The whispering campaign spread faster than one would have expected. Ridicule gave place to hostility. Nandaji started getting cold feet. The summary proceedings at his house stopped.

Meanwhile the Samiti found itself without funds. Nandaji made it a practice to commence all meetings over which he presided with a two minutes' "stand-up" silent prayer. The two minutes were sometimes extended to five if the number of sadhus present was larger, and one or two of them decided to go into an indeterminate trance. A colleague at this stage of

⁹ July 19, 1962.

our regressive paralysis remarked that the prayer-time at Samiti meetings was getting longer and longer and business briefer and briefer. Finally the party dropped Nandaji from the Cabinet before the two-year period was over. The Party had fulfilled his "pledge".

Grand Betrayal

Destiny played the cheat! In May 1962 after the third general elections had placed Nehru and the Congress Party once again in full and undisputed control of the administration, a 'flu virus compelled Nehru to lie prostrate for a week. Convalescence took another fortnight. This was the very time when Nehru needed all his strength and vitality to meet some of the most adverse challenges of his life. There is something in the old adage which says "misfortunes never come alone, but in battallions"! When I met him, soon after his convalescence, the youthful Nehru had suddenly aged. One saw a definite stoop of the shoulders, a tell-tale puffiness under the eyes, inflated blood vessels under the eye lids, a noticeable limp in the legs. He had, however, made a fast recovery much to the relief of the people and disappointment of many in and outside the party. Some had even hurriedly commissioned expert astrologers to find out the future their stars foretold, in a possible race for "succession". The recovery had been spectacular but, in between conversation, he was prone to dose off into a spell of waking sleep, suddenly bestirring himself with the remark, "Damn these anti-biotics! I have never taken so many opiates and poisons in forty years as in these forty days! Evidently it was a race for survival—the virus against myself."

During his convalescence he had been reading most of the inspired Press speculations about the likelihood of his taking long leave, retirement from active life or worse, and the possibility of his naming, or the party wanting to name, a stop-gap

or a successor. Nehru had taken the position that in a democracy no leader could or should name a successor. The man who must succeed him, when the time came, should have worked up to the position the hard way rather than be helped by his benedictions. Among the aspirants in the party, Nehru had great personal regard for Morarji. But he found him too inflexible for a bigger role, and too self-conscious of his "righteousness" which sometimes verged on arrogance. Nehru could not easily forget Morarji's statement at a Press conference during his first visit to Washington, where he had bracketed himself with Gandhi as "Men of God", and regretted that the only thing that stood between greatness and Nehru was that "he was not a man of God". "Darn it, he is not even modest about his virtues," Nehru had said.

Nehru had no illusions about Krishna Menon either. Once, returning from New York, I halted in London, and had a long, frank, intimate talk with our High Commissioner, Vijayalaxmi Pandit.¹ She told many ugly stories about Menon's tenure as High Commissioner, and asked me, in the "national interest", to convey these to her brother. I dutifully did. To my surprise, Nehru told me half a dozen other stories which had been brought to him by T. T. Krishnamachari and others who had visited New York, and added, "but these do not complete the list". "Do you consider all these stories false," I asked, taken aback! "No," said Nehru. "But I know of some even worse ones that are going the rounds about myself." Despite these reports, he considered Krishna Menon, as I did one of the most well-informed men in his Cabinet, and a dedicated trustworthy "friend". At the same time he was fully aware of the fact that, in America, Menon was considered a "professional anti-American". At home Menon had as many admirers as he had enemies. He was one man who could not live without intrigue, or act without creating a controversy.

Three persons now seemed closest to Nehru; his own daughter, Indira Gandhi, on whom he practically doted; Dr Radhakrishnan, the philosopher-statesman who had succeeded

¹ The sister of Nehru.

Rajendra Prasad as President; and the lean, dwarf-sized friend of "all seasons", Lal Bahadur Shastri, then Minister for Home Affairs. He once referred to him in terms of size and quality as the "Gem Dictionary".² Years earlier, when Indira was canvassed to accept the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress (in 1959), Nehru did not encourage the move, partly because of her delicate health and partly because he knew more than anyone else what a "crown of thorns" the presidentship could be. The interests of party harmony and smooth implementation of politics, however, required that the person elected should be least controversial and should have his fullest confidence. His daughter was the only such person conveniently available at the time. After she had been elected, he felt proud of the mature manner in which she had discharged her great responsibilities. According to him, she had brought discipline into the Congress. She had taken many firm decisions to streamline the body. "She even called me to order twice in the A.J.C.C. She asked me to sit down and wait my turn in the Working Committee," he said. Even though she had been a "discovery" to an affectionate father, he did not think she had fully ripened for major ministerial burdens. "In due course, perhaps!" To Dr Radhakrishnan he often turned for advice and consultation. He was closer to him than Rajen Babu. If things went wrong, Radhakrishnan was inclined to be understanding rather than critical. He neither claimed to be a practical politician, nor a party man. He never gave the impression of being a rival. I then felt that if the unexpected happened, Nehru would be more inclined to nominate Lal Bahadur Shastri as successor than anyone else. "There is something modest and self-effacing about Lal Bahadur," Nehru had said. "The more you know him the more you like him."

Besides the rumblings of rebellion in his own court, others who had been jealous of Nehru's position started building hopes on snatching power from the Congress during the battle of succession. Gandhi's was still a very great name. But the unknown "Gandhi Peace Foundation" suddenly spurted into

² (Mid-1962) A pocket edition English dictionary.

prominence. It called an "International Convention" to consider a ban on nuclear weapons. It met in June 1962. It staged one of the most solemn farces I have witnessed. It traded on great names and lofty ideals as a facade to a psychological dagger-play, hoping that some of the sharp, pointed, wordy weapons would hit their target. The target was Nehru.

I was one of the seventy-odd Indian delegates invited to the Convention. The Convention achieved little beyond deciding to send a delegation of "three", almost as representative of world opinion as the proverbial "Three Tailors of Tooley", to plead with Khrushchev in Moscow and Kennedy in Washington, "in the name of humanity", to stop further nuclear tests. The manner in which Gandhi's name was bandied about by the speakers, the patent lack of realism with which lofty and noble principles were advocated with blatant righteousness, the solemn manner in which impractical proposals were put forward, created an atmosphere of melodramatic unreality with an undercurrent of dirty political intrigue.

The Convention seemed to have offered a common platform to many who had worked together in the great national struggle, but in time had broken off into different political camps, and had developed different complexes about Nehru and his government. Some of them had at one time or the other been esteemed colleagues in the Congress. They, unlike the party aspirants in the race for succession, seemed concerned more with "what after Nehru?" Though they were men of different views and convictions, even hostile to each other in the past, the feeling that Nehru had lasted long enough, and had dominated the national scene too long, made them strange bedfellows, for the time being.

The session was inaugurated by Rajendra Prasad. As President of India, one assumed, he must have been more than aware of the mounting hostility against India by China and Pakistan. And yet, the focal point in his speech, which was otherwise replete with long quotations and righteous inanities, was that India should set an example and "disarm" unilaterally at once to make her appeal to world opinion for "disarma-

ment" effective. Acharya Kripalani, a former Congress President, one of Nehru's oldest colleagues, indulged in even more unrealistic heroics. Supporting Rajen Babu, he said, "My love, therefore, of nationalism, or my idea of nationalism, is that my country may become free, that if need be the whole country may die, so that the human race may live." Lord Bertrand Russell had at the time written to Nehru to send a ship to Christmas Islands where Americans had planned "atomic tests", with some people in it. No proposal could have been more impractical and patently unrealistic. Rajagopalachari had a jab at Nehru for not conceding to Lord Bertrand Russell's request. Raising his voice in righteous indignation, he regretted that "our Government should not have taken a definite step. We have lost time and it may even be said now it is too late to do anything". Another old-timer but a younger man was Jaiprakash Narayan. When Jaiprakash spoke, Nehru might well have said "*et tu Brute*". He considered the sending of a protest ship to nuclear testing areas "still worth giving careful consideration", and supported unilateral disarmament. He solemnly condemned the use of "force" by India in Goa.

Nehru sat through silently and patiently listening to these and other similar harangues for six long sessions spread over three days. He had never given so much time to any convention, nor ever sat through so patiently. Finally he lashed back against these glib provenders of sham nonviolence. "Some of us have talked of nonviolence," he said, but sometimes "the most violent of men call themselves Gandhian." He went on, "We forget that the worst violence has been practised in the name of Christ.... So I have been wondering," he said sarcastically, "whether it was only a tournament of talk for three days or whether we have achieved any thing worthwhile." In India, he said, "we have the habit of talking in the highest terms, but not acting up to them". To profess one thing and do something entirely opposite "is hypocrisy and cowardice. It is a grave danger... nothing good can come from people who are afraid, who are cowards, or from their kind of non-violence.... Speaking for myself," he said, "I prefer any

amount of violence to that type of thing." Addressing those around him at the speakers' table, he said, "But the fact is that nuclear bombs are all the time being planted in our minds and hearts." It is "the dagger and the sword, the evil in our hearts, the violence in our hearts which comes out with everything we do."

Far from feeling irritated, Nehru for the first time in many years was in an impish mood. He sat through three days of righteous bunkum, partly to meet the challenge implicit in this vocal tournament, and partly as an exercise in physical endurance. Behind all this lay the shadow of "succession". Rajen Babu, who sought physical aid to be lifted to the platform, was laid up with asthma after the inauguration. Other leaders disappeared at intervals for a siesta or rest. A couple of them dozed off even in their seats. Nehru sat through, and—what he had never done before—participated in every meal arranged for the delegates. On the last day, after dinner, he joined the delegates to witness two films, one British and one Japanese, on the atom bomb, at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Quite a few of those aspiring for succession inside and outside the party were present. The films ended near midnight. When the lights went on, I saw the Prime Minister and his daughter sitting at the rear. Half a dozen of the tired audience were asleep. Most others had disappeared after the first interval. I went up to him and said, "As a feat of endurance it was marvellous, but don't you think you have been needlessly straining yourself." He confessed to a feeling of fatigue, but bursting into a big laugh and pointing to one or two who were still asleep, said, "They are the answer to 'After Nehru Who?'. The question now is who out of these will be there when the time comes."

While Nehru had regained his self-confidence, what perturbed him was not as to who would succeed him when the time came, but as to how many of the problems, internal or external, that were gathering around him like dark clouds on the national horizon he could solve while he was still alive. Nehru could almost have said what Kennedy, with less

foreboding of the future, had once remarked: "I had plenty of problems when I came in, but wait until the fellow who follows me will see what he will inherit!"³

Nehru realized now, more than ever before, that the Party had progressively become a dead weight around his neck, that the more power he had brought to it, the less scrupulous some of the chosen ones had been in exploiting it for personal gain and self-aggrandisement. The taller he had grown, the more had those around him shrunk through the years.

Meanwhile on October 20, 1962, China launched a massive attack against India. The politicians, the services, the people were not only all caught unawares, but also in a state of utter unpreparedness. India's whole policy towards China had been a series of illusions, hopes and assumptions spread over more than ten years. It has been said that Nehru was betrayed by Chou En-lai. In fact, in retrospect, one feels that Nehru was betrayed by Nehru. He refused to see what was becoming obvious to lesser people, because he had an exaggerated opinion about his capacity to succeed diplomatically, where guns and more guns seemed the obvious answer.

Chiang Kai-shek went out of his way to extend a hand of friendship to nationalist leaders like Nehru, before independence. At the same time it was he who double-crossed and authorised publication of maps which showed Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and large areas in Assam and NEFA along the Brahmaputra river as Chinese territory. Despite later Indian protests, Mao Tse-tung never repudiated these maps or these claims. In 1950, seeing India embroiled in some of its own troubles, Chinese armies invaded Tibet, thus forcibly establishing claim to Tibet. In a speech⁴ at the time Nehru emphasised, "Please note that I have used the word 'suzerainty' and not 'sovereignty'." Later, K. M. Panikkar, the Indian Ambassador to Peking, informed China that the Prime Minister had used the word "sovereignty" and not "suzerainty". This created a lot of bewilderment in India. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai,

³ Schlesinger on Kennedy.

⁴ December 7, 1950.

the then Secretary-General, was the first to draw Nehru's attention to this egregious blunder and to its dangerous implications, in respect of India's 2,000 miles long northern frontier with Tibet. Instead of correcting the Indian Ambassador and reprimanding him for this gratuitous amendment, and boldly informing the Chinese government as to what the Prime Minister had actually said, when a clarification was later sought in Parliament, Nehru forgot what he said earlier and naïvely tried to equate the two expressions, as if the two terms had all the time seemed to him synonymous. "Some criticism has been made," he said referring to the Sino-Indian Treaty of 1954, "that this is a recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. I am not aware of any time during the last few hundred years when Chinese sovereignty or, if you like, suzerainty was challenged by any outside country." If China was sovereign in Tibet, Nehru did not explain how the British were able to maintain military contingents with the Dalai Lama's permission, and without Chinese assent or consent, in Yatung and Gyantse. How, again, when the Dalai Lama visited India twice at the invitation of the Prime Minister, the flags of Tibet were flown along the routes of his reception. Or why, again, he was in all respects treated as a Head of State and not as the chieftain of an autonomous territory.

If India had been weak in conceding Chinese "sovereignty" so easily, India was more than careless in concluding the Sino-Indian treaty of 1954. In ceding Tibet to China it should at least have made it a pre-condition that China accept the conventional and hitherto undisputed boundary between India and Tibet. China then would have gladly agreed to substantial concessions, and to a clearer and more effective demarcation. China at the time was under international pressures in the East, was having serious economic difficulties at home, and was fast losing the friendship of Russia. Besides, it was badly in need of Indian goodwill to rehabilitate itself as a peace-loving country in the eyes of other Asiatic and African countries. Above all, for the first time, it was getting under India's imprematur the undisputed gift of a thinly inhabited

territory as large as the whole of South-East Asia put together. Krishna Menon and Panikkar, the chief formulators of the China policy at the time, were the two most well-informed persons in the Government. They, more than anyone else, knew what a gift India was making. They also knew that for centuries the boundaries between India and Tibet had remained conventional, and at best loosely defined. For more than two thousand years India and Tibet had lived in peace and in a spirit of good neighbourliness, with only a few police posts here and there to regulate the incoming and outgoing of caravans on the frontiers. To have suddenly surrendered such a doubtfully demarcated buffer area to the sovereign control of an expansionist militaristic regime, whose predecessor government had even laid claims to vast areas of Indian territory, was a fatal, inexcusable blunder, if it was not also an act of infantile carelessness.

Soon after China's invasion of Tibet, the Chinese started building a road through Indian territory connecting Sinkiang with Tibet. They had no direct road-link with Tibet. A major roadway through such difficult terrain as the Himalayas, passing through long tunnels, over bridges, precipices and difficult viaducts and culverts, rising from three to fifteen thousand feet, even in advanced countries would have been a gigantic venture. In the case of China it involved thousands of labourers all along the route working day and night. And yet Indian espionage remained blind for three years. India knew nothing about this highway till in 1958 a small party "was sent" to find out the facts. Actually the first alert came from China itself when one of the Peking newspapers proudly announced that a highway connecting Sinkiang with Lhasa in Tibet had been constructed in three years, and claimed it as a unique feat of engineering. Even after this disclosure, India remained silent, hoping, said Nehru, "that it might be easier for us to deal with the Chinese Government without too much publicity for this incident."

I had occasion to meet Chou En-lai in 1956. By a curious

coincidence he and the two Lamas,⁵ who were also visiting India but were supposed to have left Delhi, met in the same party.⁶ Talking to Chou En-lai, I made a few pleasant observations, as is conventional in such parties, and hoped to move on. But both to my surprise and embarrassment, the Chinese Foreign Minister went on prolonging the conversation, changing from one innocent topic to the other. Soon I saw the two Lamas standing behind him, and the Prime Minister waiting to break into the conversation. I moved away to the host, the Ambassador of Nepal. I found Chou also moving up to the host and engaging in a long conversation. Clearly he was avoiding a meeting with the Dalai Lama. Although he maintained a calm, smiling, cheerful demeanour, one could notice that his large dark eyes, unusual for a Chinese, looked figuratively like burning coals. In the course of my contacts with hundreds of national and international personalities, I could not recollect anyone who could cover his anger with such a convincing smile. I found later that he did not expect to see the Dalai Lama at the party. He now threatened not to attend a banquet the same night in his honour if the Lamas were present. The Lamas were entertained that night by another Ambassador. For any good judge of human behaviour it should not have been difficult to see through the dual personality of Chou En-lai. He seemed to be perennially wearing a mask.

During this visit, according to Nehru, Chou En-lai had assured him that China "would respect the autonomy of Tibet". A year later the forces of "liberation" were let loose on Tibet by China. It was a miracle that the Dalai Lama escaped unharmed, followed by thousands of refugees, and took asylum in India. At this very time, shocking reports were received of Chinese military intrusions into Indian territory but were kept a secret.

Nehru now realized that he had been fooled by Chou En-lai, that before signing the Sino-Indian Treaty recognising Chinese

⁵ Dalai and Pancham.

⁶ The Dalai Lama's plane developed engine trouble, and he had to return to Delhi.

control of Tibet, he should have at the same time insisted on a clear acceptance and even demarcation of the erstwhile boundary between India and Tibet. According to him Chou En-lai had said (in 1956) that "they had agreed to recognise the McMahon Line in so far as the Burmese frontier was concerned and the Sino-Indian frontier was concerned. That would take care of the whole of the McMahon Line". He said further, "When I heard it, I wanted to be quite sure that I had not misunderstood him. Therefore I went back to the subject three times and made him repeat it. And because the matter was of such importance to me, I put it down in writing when I came away." A shrewd person like Nehru should have realized that the words spoken by politicians have no value, and that China most of all had treated even solemn-written commitments as scraps of paper! A seasoned diplomat himself, he should have obtained these assurances in writing, if they could not be made part of a solemn treaty.

Having occupied 12,000 miles of Indian territory, Chou En-lai arrived in New Delhi in 1960, to inquire, as it were, what all the commotion Nehru had created was about. He looked calm, and even seemed offended at the "misbehaviour" of some of the Indian pickets who had challenged the right of Chinese soldiers to establish posts in what China considered within "its own boundaries". At a Press conference, he felt surprised at the talk about "aggression". No one, he said, even till the day previous, and not at least the Prime Minister, had talked of any "aggression". He solemnly denied that he had ever accepted the McMahon Line as the boundary between India, Tibet and China. China, he innocently pleaded, was all the time trying to act like a good neighbour, always willing to consider any territorial dispute in a spirit of brotherly accommodation. He then suggested with fox-like cunning that since there now existed a line of "actual control" between the two countries, pending "settlement of the boundary question through discussions", let both sides keep to this line of control. Furthermore, during this period, he said, both sides should stop patrolling all sectors of the boundary.

To this last suggestion, Nehru said, he had agreed. We were all surprised! As regards his repudiation of aggression, Nehru plaintively remarked, "I had repeatedly referred to something having been done which should be undone." This seemed a most passive way of protesting against what in many official notes had been characterised as wanton intrusion and naked aggression. To Nehru's complaint that "they had entered a large area of our territory", Chou En-lai brazenly said that "they had always been there". This soft, pliant, almost cowardly attitude in the presence of Chou En-lai was in depressing contrast to the bristling sense of outrage India had expressed only a few months earlier at the attitude of China. Speaking about a letter received by him from Chou En-lai,⁷ Nehru said, "There can be no mediation, conciliation or arbitration about the demands of the Chinese for large chunks of our territory. It is fantastic and absurd for them to base their demand on what happened in past centuries." He accused the Chinese leaders of "the pride and arrogance of might". "I have a feeling", he said, "that just as there is a certain paranoia in individuals, sometimes there is a paranoia in nations. . . . It is not the yard of territory that counts, but it makes a great deal of difference if that is done in an insulting aggressive, offensive, violent manner. . . ."

When asked why government was not taking stronger action, and only exchanging notes, Nehru replied, "One takes strong action when all other actions are precluded, and also when one is prepared for strong action." This was the crux of the whole situation. India at this time, alone and unaided, was perhaps signally unprepared for strong action. In fact, during all these years of mounting hostility, India had not even thought of strong action. Worse! Even though India was one of the accepted leaders of the unaligned countries, was a friend of Russia and a friend of the United States, and had a distinctive place in the Commonwealth, in its dispute with China it stood pathetically isolated. Most of the unaligned countries and some of the Communist countries were not prepared to

⁷ Lok Sabha, September 12, 1959.

offend China. Some influenced by Chinese propaganda even believed that India, not China, was behaving like an expansionist. The antagonism between Russia and China was increasing. But Russia was still debating whether to appease China or to confront it. England and France were smarting under India's tirade against their action in Suez. Dulles had died. America was now keen about building a close intimate relationship with India. But Nehru had accepted the proffered hand of Kennedy with "a cold sweat". Among several nations in the Pacific and South-East Asia, there was both a mounting fear of and hostility towards China. Instead of befriending them, India had castigated them in the past as puppets of NATO. Now that India was in trouble, they looked askance.

Internally, India had slipped from strength to weakness. The Third Five Year Plan had run into difficulties. Foreign exchange resources had seriously dwindled. The food situation was becoming more and more grim. Allegations of graft and corruption against ministers and officials were on the increase. The administration had become clogged at various levels. The defence services which had hitherto preserved a high standard of efficiency, and had maintained certain fine traditions of discipline and dedication to duty, had suddenly been riddled with intrigues. China was fully aware of these external setbacks to our policy and internal difficulties. It also knew that the means of communication between border points on the three-thousand-mile India-Tibet boundary were still of a primitive character.⁸ In any surprise action these points could be easily isolated. "It is a territory," Nehru said,⁹ "where not even a blade of grass grows." Longju, referring to one of posts later occupied by the Chinese, said Nehru,⁹ "is five days' march from a bigger post called Limaking. Limaking, twelve days' march from the next place". The last place another five days from the "road head".

In July, 1962, the Indian Defence Minister went to Geneva. Here he met the Chinese Defence Minister, Marshall Chen Yi.

⁸ Rajya Sabha, September 10, 1959.

⁹ Lok Sabha, August 28, 1959.

The two defence Ministers cordially embraced and proposed each other's toasts. When someone asked Menon if he had read newspaper reports of a massive Chinese concentration on India's frontiers, he dismissed the report with "Menonite" contempt and remarked, "Would I be here if such a development were likely?" On return from Geneva, when more reports appeared about Chinese intrusions into Indian territory, Menon complacently assured the people that the army was strong enough to meet any threat from China. He however felt that at the time the danger to India "was more from Pakistan than from China." Nehru shared Menon's complacency. On October 12, before leaving for Ceylon on an official visit, Nehru declared at Madras that the army had been instructed to "throw the Chinese out". On October 20 the Chinese did cross over. They crossed over in massive waves from several points along the two-thousand-mile border stretching from Ladakh in the North to Walong in the East. To say that India was taken unawares would be an understatement. India was rudely shaken out of a deep stupor of complacency. Few even in the government realized what had happened. Like human cataracts, the Chinese armies began to pour down the mountain ridges, through various passes, capturing one post after another, throwing bewildered Indian defenders into confusion. "Comrades, friends and fellow countrymen," wailed a shocked and disillusioned Nehru, *a la* Mark Antony,¹⁰ "I must speak to you about the grave situation which has arisen on our frontiers, on account of continuing and unabashed aggression by the Chinese forces. We have to meet a powerful and unscrupulous opponent." He appealed to the citizens to muster strength and courage to meet the "menace".

Be it said to Nehru's credit that now when he realized he had been betrayed, he had lost his sense of fear. He became what he had always been, a man of fearless courage. "We have to fight with all our might this menace," he said, boiling with a sense of outrage.¹¹ "No self-respecting country which

¹⁰ On October 22, 1962 over the All India Radio.

¹¹ Lok Sabha, November 8, 1962.

loves its freedom and its integrity can possibly submit to this challenge.... We accept the challenge in all its consequences." Though Nehru still spoke about the virtues of nonalignment, he took, for once, some realistic decisions. "In this task," he said, "in defending our frontiers and our motherland, we have sought help from all friendly countries." These countries naturally included, among others, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and France. China did not expect this of Nehru, the saint of nonalignment. At this very time, more through the logic of circumstances than through any deliberate choice, another decision was forced upon Nehru. Krishna Menon, as Defence Minister, was made to resign.

While many thought that the exit of Menon from the Cabinet was a painful decision for Nehru, I for one knew that it was not. Nehru was feeling for sometime that Menon was becoming more a liability than an asset.¹² Much happened during the days that followed—a lot to add to our shame, to humble, overpower and disgrace India, and still a lot more—grand acts of heroism, courage and dedication to duty, enough to restore one's faith in our people's capacity not only to defend freedom but also to die for it.

¹² Chen Yi had his own story to tell about his meeting with Menon at Geneva. According to Malcolm Macdonald, the British High Commissioner who was in Peking at the time of the Chinese invasion, Chen Yi, the military genius of China, told him that during their talks in Geneva Krishna Menon gave him the impression that India would be willing to "explore a realistic settlement of the border dispute". Chen was hence surprised at the later threatening speeches of the Prime Minister and Menon.

Menon himself told me after his resignation that within the inner circle around Nehru he had become suddenly unpopular even before the October attack. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister's daughter, and Dr Radhakrishnan, the President, had been advising Nehru to get rid of Menon. They had made it impossible for him to see Nehru privately. In these days Krishna Menon kept a man posted on the roof of his house to watch when the Prime Minister left for a particular engagement. This enabled Krishna Menon to arrive along with the Prime Minister, which gave the impression to the people of his still being in the confidence of Nehru. Some of us knew what effort Krishna Menon was putting in to keep up appearances.

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Chinese Retreat: Nehru Dies

It may not have been as destructive as Hitler's panzer inroads into Poland, France and the countries of Western Europe in 1939, but the Chinese invasion of India, was as wanton, as unprovoked and as massive.¹ It lasted exactly thirty-two days. It started unilaterally, ended in a dictated cease-fire, with the withdrawal of Chinese forces to positions of their own choosing. Whatever their territorial claims, the Chinese were determined to have this showdown with India at this and no other time, for three vital reasons. They feared that the Dalai Lama who had taken asylum in India may mobilise foreign military aid for the local Khampas² who were employing guerrilla tactics, and who with sufficient outside aid could become a formidable fifth column within unsettled Tibet. The Chinese had transported by air and road a large, well-trained, mobile army. The maintenance of that army, for a long period, unless supplies could be freely available locally, was sure to become a problem, if by any chance India in a belligerant mood cut off the disputed Aksai Chin Road.³

The Chinese saw that Nehru unlike Menon the Defence Minister was becoming restive and suspicious. He might in despair turn to the United States and other countries for military aid to improve India's defence potential against the

¹ October 20, 1962.

² A warlike sect in Tibet.

³ The only major land-route for supplies of food, arms, ammunition and troops.

Chinese. Besides, Menon was losing in popularity. Just as they did not know what plans the Dalai Lama had to mobilise support for the Khampas, they had no means of discovering what secret understanding had been reached between President Kennedy and Nehru when they met alone⁴ in the autumn of 1961 and whether this secret understanding was to materialise in due course, in any large-scale military aid, or any guarantees for joint defence, or something even more effective, to contain China. If such a guarantee, or collusion, meant at any time the cutting off of the Aksai Chin Road, the Chinese felt, this would be like cutting off China's jugular vein. It may even involve the loss of Tibet.

China further felt that even though it had collected a formidable force in the plateau of Tibet, it was in a hostile country and had to operate in a difficult terrain. If India's patience was exhausted, and if perchance Indian leadership changed, or if, in despair, Nehru through collusive efforts obtained large-scale supplies of modern military equipment and an air armada from countries hostile to China, India may become intractable. India had vastly greater trained and untrained human resources to overwhelm the isolated Chinese force in Tibet. The Chinese had still not outlived the dread of a Sikh, Gurkha or Rajput soldier. Keeping these factors in view, the Chinese felt that a mass attack at this time would serve many purposes. It would overawe the Tibetans, expose India's military weakness, humble India in the eyes of Afro-Asians, and frustrate any anticipatory move by the Dalai Lama or Indian leaders to seek foreign aid to repel China. Autumn was well chosen for the attack, although the weather even at this time permitted no more than sixty days for any free movement of troops in regions likely to be bogged by rain, sleet and snow.

The Chinese invasion therefore was well-timed and carefully planned. If words could be any substitute for weapons, Indian leaders were not wanting. Soon after the massive intrusions started they began indulging in wild outbursts of oratory, as

⁴ Mr Krishna Menon had been kept out of the talks.

if thereby they could repel the Chinese. Krishna Menon, who had earlier attempted appeasement and had toasted the Chinese Defence Minister in Geneva, now declared that "India would fight the Chinese to the last man and last gun". As one military reverse followed another, annoyance and complacency gave place to bravado. In imitation of Churchill, Menon declared, "If we have to fall back, we will fall back, but still we will continue to fight." Members of Parliament like Kripalani and leading politicians like Rajaji, who had earlier urged India to undertake unilateral disarmament, who had considered the building up of a large army as un-Gandhian, now turned their guns against the Government, accusing it of unpreparedness, and of cowtowing to the Chinese.

The first part of the Chinese invasion started on the morning of October 22, and abated on the 1st of November. The Chinese occupied "threatening positions at points of strategic advantage all over the Indian frontier". At this stage, to confound India's friends, the Chinese offered to "withdraw 20 kilometers behind the line of actual control". Nehru spurned the offer with dignified contempt. He demanded that if the Chinese meant peace, they should go back to the boundary obtaining prior to September 8, when their aggression had first commenced.

Meanwhile, the Chinese had been preparing for their next aggressive thrust which in cunning, surprise and strategy was a match even for some of Rommel's performances in World War II. Instead of concentrating India's main fighting strength in the lower reaches, where logistics would have been against the Chinese, and the terrain very much in favour of the Indian forces enabling them to employ tanks and heavy armour, a politico-military decision was taken to concentrate a large military force and heavy equipment at Se La, which stood four thousand feet above. The Indian position in Se La seemed manifestly unassailable to "experts", because even if the Chinese captured Tawang they would have to face a thousand-feet drop to reach Se La exposing themselves to a severe artillery barrage.

These experts however had miscalculated Se La's impregnability. They also completely misjudged Chinese capacity for improvisation. It was their presumption that unless the Chinese constructed a road into NEFA, which might take months, they could not bring heavy equipment beyond Bum La. In the absence of heavy equipment, the Indian army, from its strategic position in Se La, could overpower the Chinese even though superior in numbers.

Indian Intelligence failed as completely as the experts. The Chinese by-passed the tricky terrain between Tawang and Se La. They improvised a route through the lower ranges, completing it surreptitiously in fifteen days. They attacked Indian forces from the rear, throwing the entire holding force in utter confusion. They captured both Bomdi La and Se La.

The Indian army, outnumbered and outmanoeuvred, was routed before staging even a retreat. Those who did not fall in enemy hands took to the jungles, and with great difficulty reached places of safety.

On November 19 after the tragic fall of Bom La and Se La, Nehru, in his second major broadcast to the nation, asked his people not to be dismayed at the initial successes of the Chinese. "This is war," he said in a bold, challenging voice, "and in a war successes come and failures come also.... We shall see this matter to the end; the end will have to be a victory for India." After expressing his grateful thanks to countries like the U.S.A. and the U.K. which had sent expeditious help, he said, "We shall require more help... because it is a matter of survival for us."

One wished Nehru had spoken and acted like this when the Chinese after overrunning Tibet (in 1951) had forcibly cut through 12,000 square miles of Indian territory to build the Aksai Chin highway. By then Chinese intentions had become clear. Later, with Kennedy presiding in the White House, if Nehru had made such a call, China would have desisted from aggression. Even if China did for any mad reason or other invade India, the Indian forces with modern equipment, supported by an air armada, could have not only overpowered the

Chinese, but would have even made their position in Tibet difficult.

Three days after the speech, even though India's rich oil fields lay at their feet, and the deserted city of Tezpur offering free entry into the Brahmaputra Valley and Assam lay practically undefended and partly deserted, the Chinese declared a cease-fire and beat a hurried retreat to chosen strategic positions. They carried with them, apart from weapons and supplies, everything that they could, to supplement their depleted resources. They removed doors and windows, took away kitchenware, sanitary ware, even commodes and service pots, pipes, girders and beams, as a part of their booty.

There has been a lot of mud-slinging between generals and politicians, since this disaster. Efforts have been made to find scapegoats responsible for failures and blunders which led to this grave tragedy. Very few among politicians within and without parliament, irrespective of parties, showed at any time the necessary concern for India's security and a fuller awareness of Chinese designs on Indian territory. While the Government was loudly criticised on different occasions, China was treated more as a political weapon to attack Nehru and his Government, rather than as a real and dangerous enemy. Until the time Nehru decided to cast off all inhibitions, and to go all out for foreign aid, he and all those in supreme authority had blundered diplomatically, administratively and militarily. Krishna Menon had perhaps blundered the most, both on the diplomatic and the defence front. He was rightly made a scapegoat for these joint blunders, and thrown out of the Central Cabinet. General Thapar, the Chief of Staff, and Lieutenant-General Kaul, a young, inexperienced but enthusiastic officer, were also made scapegoats for the army reverses. Except a few generals who got cold feet in an unforeseen situation, it was more a question of unpreparedness than individual blunders that accounted for the military disasters. Even for these the politicians were to blame more than any set of military men. At the eleventh hour the Government took amateurish military decisions over the heads of experienced

army Commanders,⁵ thereby adding to the confusion that the Chinese by their surprise tactics had already created.

Reacting to the courage and heroism of the Army, men, women and children all over the country soon rose as one man behind the Jawans and Nehru. People from all walks of life—farmers, labourers, workmen and city folk—showed rare enthusiasm for doing something, anything, for the defence of the country, and to keep up the morale and spirit of the Jawans at the front. Since units of the improvised 4th infantry division under Gen. Kaul had to be rushed up to the chilly snow-peaks of NEFA from the plains in summer outfit, a call was sent round for blankets, sweaters, pullovers, windcheaters, etc. Blankets and quilts came in their thousands from cities and villages all over the country. While most sweaters and pullovers followed a standard size and pattern, one did come across many which enthusiastic village women had woven: sometimes big enough to fit a beer barrel, and sometimes so small that even a teenager would have to squeeze into. But behind them was the effort and devotion of common people.

A call was sent to mobilise and train home guards, civil defence personnel, nurses, fire-fighters, etc. Thousands everywhere enlisted. What was lacking was not enthusiasm but trainers. Once the talk of nonviolence had died down, both young and old, even women, volunteered to enlist for active service, or at least to receive training in the use of fire-arms. Several rifle clubs were quickly set up. But it was pathetic that the rifle clubs had few rifles and no ammunition.

The Chinese waged war, not only with weapons, but also through a highly specialised propaganda machinery. They had powerful radio stations working night and day on the Indian border, employing every method to undermine the morale of our troops and confuse the civilian population. Even though the Indian radio system was no less well equipped, very little serious or intelligent effort was made to counter the Chinese

⁵ Men like Generals Timmayya, Thorat, Kulwant Singh, Dube and a few more had not only an excellent fighting record, but knew the NEFA region intimately. They were available, but were not even seriously consulted.

propaganda. Even the patriotic songs that were improvised in a hurry seemed infantile.

No convincing explanation has yet been forthcoming for the unilateral declaration of cease-fire by the Chinese on November 22. The question still remains unanswered as to why, having advanced so easily and so far, the Chinese suddenly decided to retreat to their original strongholds with lightening rapidity. If such a dramatic move was not already pre-planned, then it should seem that several factors influenced the Chinese decision. They realized that their high-powered propaganda machinery had utterly failed in terrorising the people or in lending strength to a possible fifth column that they expected would actively mobilize itself around extreme Communist supporters in India. They also realized that, after the first stunning impact, the four hundred and fifty million people of India, by and large, had been roused to a sense of danger, and with the spirit of "do or die" which two decades ago had inspired them to face the bullets and the bayonets of the British. While they gained some easy and spectacular military successes, they were still uncertain whether some of the withdrawals were not part of a bigger strategy to draw them further from their supply lines, before engaging them in a major encounter near the plains. Added to this was the fear that in a few days heavy seasonal rains and snow in the higher altitudes may not only cut off supplies but make even retreat difficult. Above all, they saw that, in response to Nehru's appeal, foreign military aid had started pouring in. The nature and quantity of this they had no means to assess. They knew full well that India was not short of trained man-power, but only of sophisticated modern equipment. According to one report Kennedy had already alerted the Pacific fleet, and one of the aircraft carriers was reported within easy reach of Calcutta. The Chinese had not commissioned their own Air Force. Nor had India. But the Chinese with their bases in unsettled if not hostile Tibet, with the Aksai Chin route vulnerable to air damage, were more afraid of air operations than India. Before

such operations started with American help, they decided to return to zones of safety.

While Nehru's critics rightly accused him and his top colleagues of diplomatic, political and military blunders in dealing with China, of chosing square pegs to fill round holes and for imposing amateurish decisions through incompetent favourites; in the final stage of the disaster, his personality once again emerged, grand, lustrous and inspiring. In this dark, bewildering hour of defeat, he saw his whole concept of *Panch Sheel* turn into an illusion. He rose to giant heights of leadership.⁶ On the diplomatic front, he soon got Afro-Asian countries working on cease-fire proposals more in accord with India's position. These India accepted. China did not. In the capitals of the world there was now better appreciation of India's position, and even in Moscow official sympathies were more with India than with China.

Nehru also directed his efforts, towards mending the fences at home. The vacancy created by Menon was filled by Y. B. Chavan, a younger, more realistic and practical-minded politician. Chavan suffered from no "isms". Unlike Menon he had no complexes, allergies or inhibitions. He never allowed his confidence to express itself in arrogance. As a very young man he had entered the Congress in the late 'thirties, and had organised some of the many spectacular underground activities in the 1942 movement, at great personal risk. He was a Mahratta by birth, tracing back his ancestry to the martial traditions of Shivaji. As Chief Minister of Bombay he had shown great administrative tact and talent, and had built up a

⁶ Nehru expressed special appreciation for the prompt response his appeal for military and other assistance had received from the United States and Great Britain. As regards the United States (article "Changing India" in *Foreign Affairs* by Nehru, New York, April, 1963), Nehru said, "Indo-American relations have never been so close and cordial as they have been now. The deep sympathy and support received from the United States in meeting the Chinese aggression has created a wealth of good feeling, and, apart from that, there is much in common between us on essentials. President Kennedy's vision of a world of free and dependent nations, freely cooperating so as to bring about a world-wide system of interdependence, is entirely in accord with our own ideas."

fine reputation for efficiency. Robust in physique, a man of action and relying less on speeches, realistic and practical, Chavan was in all respects different from Menon. Chavan, in complete reversal of Menon's policy, left military matters in the hands of experts and promotions to considerations of merit. General Chaudhuri who had earlier distinguished himself in the Hyderabad Police action, and in the conquest of Goa, took over as Chief of the Army Staff.

Realising that time was running out, and that his physical capacities could not stand up to the problems that were gathering around him, Nehru tried to create an inner core of associates around Lal Bahadur Shastri, who could take over some of the responsibilities during his life-time, and could lend to his policies continuity, if the worst happened. He saw that while the problems were Herculean, he no longer had a giant's strength. His mood could best be summed up in the verses of Robert Frost he had copied and kept by his bedside :

*The woods are lovely dark and deep
But I have promises to keep.
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

If Nehru had lived another few years, he would perhaps have pulled a lot of his own "chestnuts from the fire". His mind was now working in the right direction.

I was in Bangalore sitting in a Newspaper office when the news first came that Nehru was seriously ill. Then followed the tragic report that Nehru was dead.⁷ I left in a special plane carrying Chief Ministers and other VIPs for North India. Through thick clouds, lightning, thunder and gales, we practically bumped our way, reaching Delhi before midnight. Despite pouring rain, a few thousand drenched men and women stood in an endless queue to pay their last homage to the great hero.⁸ Buried under maunds and maunds of roses, leis of mari-

⁷This happened on the 27th of May, 1964.

⁸After I had been held up an hour in the queue, someone recognised me and took me through a side entrance to where the body lay.

golds and jasmines, his face serene, his eyes closed, lay in eternal rest the man who had suffered many, many years of imprisonment himself to make India free, who for more than two decades had waged a war to his last breath, against poverty, ignorance and human inequalities, and on behalf of peace, international understanding and the setting-up of a world order based on justice and friendly co-existence. Like all great men who think and act ahead of their times, he failed in eradicating poverty and ignorance among his own people. He failed in insuring peace through the diplomacy of good neighbourliness. But the seeds he had sown were bound to lead India along the path of greatness and the world away from war and strife and towards peace and understanding.

Next day millions lined the route, and hundreds of thousands with tear-brimmed eyes watched the smoke rise out of the funeral pyre and waft away, like a cloud of many dreams, along the silent course of the eternal Yamuna. As we returned, the question was uppermost on everyone's lips: Who now after Nehru?

Adventures of “Nanhe”

*Nanhe*¹ had come from Benares by ferry to the opposite bank of the holy Ganges to witness a big religious festival. It had attracted thousands of pilgrims, Yogis and Sadhus from all over the country. This was the first big festival Nanhe had visited without being chaperoned by members of his family. The few coppers he had saved out of a token pocket money he received from his uncle² had soon been spent. When the time came for the party to return to Benares, Nanhe felt worried. He had no money to pay for the ferry. He did not wish to borrow. To confess his predicament would have been humiliating. While the party was moving to the boat, Nanhe disappeared into the milling crowd. After a vain search, the comrades left. As Nanhe stood by the Ganges bank, the sun was setting, the moon was up. Temple bells were chiming.³ Nanhe bundled his clothes on his head and jumped into the cool deep waters of the holy river. Through superhuman effort he swam through to the other bank. Nanhe was duly spanked for giving an anxious hour to the family. No one appreciated the reasons which had compelled him to risk his life, or the resolve and endurance he had shown in taking that risk. None around him at the time realised that the lean, dwarfish, chubby-faced, angel-eyed Nanhe, whose people could hardly afford sending

¹ A pet name meaning “Tiny”.

² With whom he lived after the death of his father.

³ Cremation banks on the Ganges.

him to school, would one day be chosen the Prime Minister of India.

Within a few minutes after Nehru's death, Gulzari Lal Nanda, the Home Minister, was sworn in as Prime Minister. But even before the sandalwood flames to which Nehru's body had been cast, had died out, the succession had become a subject of intrigue, horse-trading and sordid diplomacy. Should the new Prime Minister be from the North or the South, the East or the West? Should he be from the left or the right, or just dead centre? Should he represent "new blood" or the "old guard"? Should he be a Gandhian or a Nehruite? These were a few of the many questions that succession posed.

Initially the leftists wanted Nanda with his Trade Union background. The rightists rallied around Morarji Desai, who combined some demonstrable Gandhian austeries, with the firmness and executive drive of Vallabhbhai Patel. For a time Jagjivan Ram, the leader of the depressed classes, insisted, in the name of all the Harijans, on being chosen.⁴ With Vallabhbhai, Rajendra Prasad, Azad, Pant and Nehru dead, the "High Command" ceased to exist. Its place was now taken by the "Syndicate" consisting of S. K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh, D. P. Mishra, etc. The "Syndicate" started taking a hand in the negotiations. Practically all the Chief Ministers who had come for the funeral decided to stay over till the succession was finally settled. For a time it seemed a straight contest between "left" and "right", between Gulzari Lal Nanda and Morarji Desai, both hailing from Gujarat. As a compromise candidate some even suggested the name of Indira Gandhi. It was Kamaraj, the realistic Congress President, who decided that, all things considered, the fittest person to step into Nehru's shoes would be the quiet, unassuming, diligent Lal Bahadur Shastri (*Nanhe*). Even Leftists worked up last moment alignments with Morarji Desai, considering Lal Bahadur not tall enough, or big enough, for "Nehru's shoes". Finally, Lal Bahadur and Morarji were the only two serious candidates left in the field.

⁴ He later transferred his support to Morarji on the promise of being nominated Deputy Prime Minister.

Then some of the influential Chief Ministers took a hand. Chavan, the Defence Minister, returned from the United States and tilted the scales in favour of Lal Bahadur. The syndicate joined Kamaraj. By a process of "consensus", Lal Bahadur was chosen to succeed Nehru.

I had often met Lal Bahadur during the time he was working in the Servants of the People Society⁵ when he was Secretary of the Congress, and later when he was Minister in the Central Cabinet. He impressed me deeply but never conveyed the impression of being "important". He had more than nine years of imprisonment to his credit. He had a record of two decades of dedicated service to his people in different spheres. Yet he was modest and unassuming. When he was holding a ministerial post,⁶ he preferred to travel incognito. On one occasion a large crowd of admirers was waiting to receive him at the Agra Railway Station. Lal Bahadur quietly alighted from the train and tried to get out by the Third Class exit. An officious Police Officer stopped him, saying, "No one can get out till the Police Minister has left." Someone pulled up the Officer, saying, "But he is the Police Minister." Still in doubt, and feeling it was a leg-pull, the officer remarked, "Jao, jao,"⁷ this little man can't be our Police Minister.⁸

After leaving the Kashi Vidyapith,⁹ Lal Bahadur became a life member of the Servants of the People Society. He took the "Shastri" diploma in Philosophy. His academic achievements were modest, but he soon qualified in the rich field of experience. Whether in prison or outside, he lived the life of a common

⁵ After closing the Tilak School of Politics, Lajpat Rai founded the Servants of the People Society. This was patterned on the "Servants of India Society" started at Poona a decade earlier by Gokhale. Life members of the Society were paid an honorarium to meet their own and family expenses. They were pledged to dedicate their entire life to the service of the people. If at any time called upon to accept political or other office, they were expected to return to the Society any sums received by them over and above such reasonable expenditure they had to incur in office.

⁶ Minister for Home Affairs and Police in the United Provinces.

⁷ Tell this to the Marines.

⁸ D. R. Manekkar, *Lal Bahadur*, p. 63.

⁹ A national institute started by those who had left their colleges.

man, feeling the pinch of a common man's needs, not just commiserating like some other leaders with poverty.¹⁰ He read a lot when opportunity offered; worked a lot without thinking of recompense. He observed and experienced a lot of the life of his backward people.

Taking into consideration all the circumstances at the time, I for one was still inclined to prefer Morarji Desai, despite all his fads. One felt at the time that what the country needed was a strong man. Apart from being confronted with two enemies, India was faced with many difficult domestic problems, political as well as economic. These needed courage, firmness and resourcefulness: qualities which one associated with Morarji Desai, but of which the quiet, unassuming Lal Bahadur had not given any demonstrable proof.

As a patriot, it was true he had shown great courage, and had not quailed at any physical risk or sacrifice. As a Minister he had shown commendable tact, resourcefulness and administrative ability. But he had all along served as an understudy. If it came to firm action, even a war, it was doubtful if he could meet the challenge.¹¹ Morarji on the other hand had built up a good reputation as Chief Minister of Bombay, and later on as Minister of Commerce and Finance. My fears were shared by many others. I was not surprised when at his first Press Conference, Lal Bahadur was exposed to rather rude and disparaging questions, both personal and regarding the Party. He cut a sorry figure. He even felt irritated. Later on the Press held a reception in his honour. The manner in which he mixed with Pressmen, the informality of his approach, soon created around him an aura of affability. When I casually asked him if he would like to say a few words, he agreed. None of us

¹⁰ "I know," he once remarked, "what it is to live on Rs 2.50 a month."

¹¹ About Nanda and Lal Bahadur, some people uncharitably quoted the Persian Proverb which said it makes no difference if an ass goes and a donkey comes. Others satirically remarked about the leadership. "Har shakh par ullu baitha hai, ab hal gulshan kya hoga." (An owl is sitting on every branch. God only knows what will happen to the garden). One poet said: "Guthenge kanton se daman—gule, wali-e-gulshan charmer hoga." (When cobblers become florists thorns will be used to tie bouquets).

expected a speech. But soon, what started as a brief thanks offering, developed into an informal Press Conference. One could see that by his frankness and candour, his simple direct answers, his suave manner of speech, he had mastered the situation and had won over the Indian and the foreign Press.

As time passed, we of the Press and the people in general realized that Lal Bahadur was by far the best man to fill the post of Prime Minister at that critical juncture. He had no "isms" about him. He had no favourites.¹² He had no fads. His mind neither soared to the skies, nor was it obsessed by preconceived notions or prejudices. He was pliable enough to accept advice from any and every quarter, but when a decision had been made, he had the courage to see it through with firmness, disregardful of consequences.

Lal Bahadur as the Home Minister and now as Prime Minister was firm in putting down corruption in high places. The Kamaraj Plan had been a camouflaged purge. But no one knew who among those who retired from public office were the "white sheep" and who the "black sheep". "Corruption and good government cannot go well together," he said, "and if one could make an example of some of the tall poppies, the lesser types of corruption could be weeded out by itself." His own unimpeachable honesty had also a great effect on reducing corruption in high places. Integrity from now onwards was not taken for granted. "It had to be proven," he said. Lal Bahadur did not hesitate to call for proofs. T. T. Krishnamachari¹³ whom Nehru had invited to a second term as Finance Minister found himself suddenly involved in what came to be known as the "Barium" scandal. Serious charges were levelled inside and outside the House. Lal Bahadur felt that sufficient *prima facie* material was available to justify an

¹² When a Communist Member accused him of having a "split personality" in the Lok Sabha, he felt outraged and declared, "I have never had a split personality. I don't believe in saying one thing and doing another. I have never believed in groupism or groups. I belong to no group. I hate provincialism and casteism. Most of all I hate intrigue, and have never indulged in intrigue myself."

¹³ Who had earlier resigned after the Mundhra affair.

inquiry.¹⁴ He informed T. T. Krishnamachari accordingly. Krishnamachari resigned.

Lal Bahadur did not get much time to tap talent from outside the party. He mostly carried on with the colleagues he had inherited except that he asked Indira Gandhi to take up "Information and Broadcasting". According to him, out of a sense of "loyalty to his erstwhile chief". He hoped in due course, when he had the time, to go in more for quality and integrity rather than creating another party jamboree from all the nit-wits who could pull the wires and exert Party pressures without strengthening the administration. As an alternative he did something which placed at his disposal a lot of concentrated, expert knowledge to help him to make intelligent decisions, direct the affairs even of other Ministers, and to solve some of the most difficult problems to an extent it would not have been otherwise possible. Nehru was mostly surrounded by couriers who took orders, but dared not give advice; who smoothed over pitches but did not oppose or question decisions. They felt no responsibility for wrong decisions, nor received credit for offering the right advice.¹⁵

Lal Bahadur on the other hand surrounded himself with a few of the best brains in the administrative field. He not only freely consulted these men but encouraged them to offer expert advice on their own. Even in the Cabinet, he believed in consultation and full and free discussion before decisions were taken. In fact he welcomed and encouraged advice from all quarters. When it came to a decision, he and his experts had the final say.¹⁶

¹⁴ As soon as the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister, he declared, was satisfied that a *prima facie* case existed against a Minister, an inquiry had to be ordered at once.

¹⁵ Speaking at the Jaipur Session of the A.I.C.C. one of Nehru's close party colleagues summed up this complaint in an Urdu couplet—much to Nehru's annoyance. Mahavir Tyagi said: "Tail bearers have become your best friends. Good advisers seem to be in disgrace. You dislike the faithful and befriend the treacherous. You have forgotten those who offered their heads to make you the headman."

¹⁶ His personal secretary, L. K. Jha, was a distinguished Cambridge graduate, a capable administrator and a fine writer.

The change from Nehru the giant to Lal Bahadur the dwarf had been initially a cause of concern to many. By his unassuming simplicity, his candour and integrity, his willingness to hold consultations even with the Opposition, his down-to-earth approach to national problems, and his courage to enforce decisions, Lal Bahadur soon built up for himself a new image, rising to a high stature in the eyes of his people. "By their fruits ye shall know them." By the sober caution with which he acted, the conscientious manner in which he discharged his difficult and onerous responsibilities, Lal Bahadur began to more than justify his choice as Prime Minister.

Lal Bahadur concentrated on three major sectors of activity—clean, efficient administration, the economic health of the country, and defence. By appointing vigilance officers, by notifying that promotion henceforth could not be a matter of right but in consideration of merit, and that genuine suspicion could be a cause of demotion, if not dismissal, he created a psychology of discipline which had hitherto been absent in the Secretariat. But he could do little to actually check or stem corruption in the services in the short time at his disposal. He laid down a code for politicians in office, and also set down conditions which could call for or justify a probe into private fortunes. Here again he could not achieve much although he did take some daring decisions against influential colleagues.¹⁷

In the economic field he set himself severely against "giantism". There were many who wanted a mammoth Fourth Plan, before even the Third Plan had got out of the doldrums. Lal Bahadur mostly concentrated on completion of some of the development schemes in hand.¹⁸ Discussing economic objectives, he said, "I feel the country needs a compromise between the Gandhian concept of reducing wants by renunciation, and the Nehru concept of raising the general standard of living by

¹⁷ To check rising prices, a large number of fair price shops were opened, consumer cooperatives were offered incentives, and the prices of some of the common needs of the people were strictly regulated.

¹⁸ "I do not wish to waste money on paper plans," he said in Parliament. "I want performance. Something that we can achieve with the funds we have to meet the urgent needs of the people."

increasing the productive capacity of the nation. I believe that our aim should be self-reliance, and the building-up of a self-generating economy." "If all the well-to-do," I remarked, "accepted your standard of life as a pattern, there would even now be enough and to spare to fight poverty." With a twinkle in his eyes, he replied, "The life I am now leading is not so simple. You have only to see what the State spends on the Prime Minister. It is scandalous! If I had my way a lot of expenditure on big houses etc. for Ministers could be reduced. We have to set a social pattern consistent with our national traditions. And this still could be no socialism either."

When Lal Bahadur was preparing to go to the Prime Minister's Conference in London, he sought sartorial advice from his Secretaries. They were unanimous that he should at least wear the formal *achkan*, *churidars*, conventional socks and shoes, etc. during the visit. He still had a rough, *pattu*¹⁹ long-coat. He wore it in real cold weather. He asked why he should not wear that coat, a *kurta*²⁰ and *dhotie*? "I do not see why I should wear an *achkan* and *churidars* when Gandhiji could visit Buckingham palace in a loin cloth," he protested. "But then, sir, India had not officially adopted a formal national dress," intervened one of the Advisers. "Besides, when the Queen came to India, you did wear an *achkan* and *churidars* at the Prime Minister's banquet." Lal Bahadur laughed. "That is true," he said. "My wife got an *achkan* made and the Prime Minister lent me a pair of *churidars*. Wearing it, he insisted, was essential." After an innocent pause he observed, "But you do not know what happened? At one stage the waist band got so entangled, that I left the party in embarrassment without even an apology. I do not want the incident to be repeated again, nor have I improved my knowledge as to how waist bands should be tied." When Lal Bahadur visited Moscow, the Russian hosts seeing him inadequately covered presented him with two top coats. He accepted the gift. Next day his servant was seen wearing the more costly of the two.

¹⁹ Coarse hand-spun woollen fabric.

²⁰ Loose shirt falling to the knees.

I had heard gossips say that when Lal Bahadur resigned from the Cabinet in response to the Kamaraj Plan, an astrologer from Benares had told his wife that whatever may happen, her husband should not leave 10, Moti Lal Nehru Place. It was likely to bring him a lot of luck. It did happen that while all other Ministers who quit the Cabinet shifted to less ostentatious Government bungalows, Lal Bahadur continued to occupy his official residence. A few month's later, Nehru suffered a stroke and Lal Bahadur alone out of the ex-Ministers was invited to return to the Cabinet as "Minister Without Portfolio". He stayed on in "No. 10". Later as Prime Minister he chose to continue in the same house. A neighbouring bungalow²¹ was vacated to serve as an official appendage for his personal Secretariat, and for Visitors. Lal Bahadur gave a broad smile. "I do not deny that, like other Indian ladies, my wife might be consulting astrologers. But my reasons for still being in No. 10, have nothing to do with astrologers. After I resigned, I wanted to shift to a smaller place. I could no longer afford the upkeep of this house. I was offered several alternative houses. I considered all of them too large for my needs. The change from this large house to a less large bungalow would not have meant any economy in expenditure. Thus a few months passed in this search. Meanwhile I could do no more than cut down the domestic expenditure to a minimum. Thanks to my wife and the cooperation of the children, we cut down a lot. She did the cooking and we did a lot of the domestic washing ourselves. Then came the sudden illness of the Prime Minister, and my return to office. Even then my search for something smaller and more compact continued. After taking office as Prime Minister, I have had to struggle hard wanting to shift to less ostentatious surroundings. In this house, many elaborate changes and extensions were suggested but I disapproved. Frankly, even most of those that have been carried out have been against my wishes."

"May be," I said, "some of your colleagues felt that if the Prime Minister started on a programme of austerity and

²¹ Occupied by the New Zealand High Commissioner.

simplicity, they may have to follow suit." "That is perhaps true. But sooner or later we who call ourselves the servants of the people, and draw emoluments from the public exchequer, will have to do away with a lot of expensive pomp and show ourselves. Socialism should begin with the privileged adopting a simple pattern of life. In India we can do so, as our necessities are easily met. Once those at the top decide to cut down their needs, the standard of living of the under-privileged will automatically rise even by comparison."

During the conversation a liveried team of underlings appeared with a tea tray, another tray containing some favourite dish of fried potatoes for the Prime Minister, a third tray with snacks and eatables and still another tray with fruits. Before placing the trays they dusted the table and the tea trays giving us a demonstration of the adage, "too many cooks spoil the broth". Pointing at the litter of trays, dishes, snacks, spoons, etc., and the ensemble of liveried underlings who were helping to do everything for us, even deciding on the quantity of sugar or milk we should take, all except eating on our behalf, Lal Bahadur said, "All this, for example, has to go. One should even make his own tea and serve it." I asked in return, reluctantly taking a cold, badly-fried snack, traditional of the standards of expensive government catering, "It has to go, I agree; but why has it been there at all, and so long?" Lal Bahadur smiled and said, "Although the British and the princes have gone, the new rulers (officials) have not changed their way of life. In the places of authority, we still retain the *chotta sahib*, *bara sahib* and the *lat sahib*²² mentality. The top civil servants have adopted *gala bands*,²³ sometimes even in *khadi*, but they struggle hard keeping up to the old ways of life, or the one they say is laid down in the blue books left by the British. Do you know, whenever I have wanted to do something as 'myself', I am told that it would involve more expenditure than if I did it as the bluebooks say, as 'Prime Minister'."

²² "Lat" used for Governors.

²³ Tunics.

Starting as a dark horse, Lal Bahadur soon established his claim to national leadership. A few months after his appointment as Prime Minister, the AICC met at Bangalore to decide who should be the next Congress President. The AICC had decided at Jaipur that no Congress President should be elected for the second term. Kamaraj's term of two years had now come to an end. He had served the Congress well and selflessly through a difficult and critical period. Kamaraj himself was willing to be drafted, but was unwilling to contest. Morarji Desai and many others in the Party, whether on principle or for personal reasons, were opposed to any change in the Jaipur resolution. Ironically enough, it was now the turn of Lal Bahadur to employ his influence with the party, not only to alter the Jaipur decision but also to unanimously re-elect Kamaraj as Congress President for the second term.

In the international sphere Lal Bahadur could do very little beyond maintaining a sort of status quo. He could not attend the Prime Ministers' Conference in London on account of a serious heart attack. He could not keep a date with President Lyndon Johnson in Washington for the same reason. He did visit Canada. His visit to Moscow was a tremendous success. Even then, one of the matters to which, after his appointment, he gave high priority was to establish some kind of rapport with Pakistan, to see if ways and means could be found to bring the two countries nearer, and to lessen the tensions that were increasing a sense of distrust and hostility on both sides. A couple of Conferences at the official level and between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries had not yielded any substantial results. In fact every effort Lal Bahadur made towards understanding was interpreted as weakness and led to greater intransigence and increasing hostility from Pakistan.

After Jinnah, in less than a decade the Muslim League ceased to be a political power in both wings of Pakistan. This happened partly because of political corruption at the top levels, and partly because the prominent leaders of the League who migrated from India were not able to establish any grass roots in the areas which constituted Pakistan. With time, the

economic disparities and political differences between the Western and Eastern wings of Pakistan, separated by more than a thousand miles of Indian territory, became irreconcilable, generating fissiparous tendencies between the two wings. In order to neutralise some of the disparities, the League decided to eliminate the provinces and to have one State in the West and another in the East. H. S. Suhrawardy, one of the Central Ministers from the East had aspired to rule the whole of Pakistan if democratic institutions could be expanded and if the East could get representation proportionate to its population in the Central Parliament. "I will rule Pakistan from Dacca," he had said.²⁴ Pakistan was thus confronted with two alternatives. Either to enlarge the sphere of democratic partnership between the two wings, or to silence the voice of opposition by executive action.

At the time of the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, the roly-poly Cambridge-educated Khwaja Nazimuddin, a migrant from Calcutta, and once Premier of Bengal, was the Governor-General in succession to Jinnah. By his own decree he installed himself as Prime Minister. He made Finance Minister Ghulam Mohammed the Governor-General. Ghulam Mohammed²⁵ had a genius for intrigue, as much as he had a flair for the spectacular. So it happened that after a few years he decided to dismiss Nazimuddin, the very man who had appointed him Governor-General. Then followed a grand period of intrigue, instability and corruption in the affairs of Pakistan. Prime Ministers came and went almost on the French pattern after World War II. One stable element and common factor in all these hand-picked Ministers, however, was one Sardar Ayub Khan, Sandhurst-trained and a former Commander-in-Chief. He had been appointed Defence Minister by Nazimuddin. He continued to hold this post till 1958.

²⁴ Suleri.

²⁵ After retirement from the supplies department, Ghulam Mohammad had occupied important jobs in Travancore and Hyderabad. He left a trail of enquiries into his official conduct behind when securing from Jinnah his appointment as Finance Minister in Pakistan.

Ghulam Mohammed did not last as Governor-General for more than two years.²⁶ He was replaced by General Iskander Mirza, a former Commander-in-Chief, also a Sandhurst-trained soldier with a Persian background. He assumed the title of President. Bridge-playing Iskander Mirza was an even greater master of intrigue than Ghulam Mohammed. He also had the advantage of using the military iron fist when necessary. He used politicians as puppets, neutralised their power by pitching one against the other and sabotaging attempts at Constitution-making by breaking up political parties. He was even credited with the private ambition of setting up a Mirza "dynasty". If his plans at eliminating oppositionists had succeeded, Iskandar "Alexander" would have been "King!" Iskandar Mirza dismissed five Prime Ministers in less than three years.²⁷

In a military coup he was dismissed by Ayub Khan. Ayub Khan entered public life riding a tank through the military portals. But he gradually showed that he combined ruthlessness with generosity, and a sense of state-craft one normally associates with a civilian. He went for results rather than attempting to justify the methods adopted to achieve them. His decision to shift the capital of Pakistan from Karachi to Islamabad, a suburb of Rawalpindi, was characterised by many as a mad, expensive venture. Islamabad even after a decade was only a city in the making. Situated at the foothills of snow-covered Himalayan peaks, climatically it was cooler and healthier during the year than Karachi. But it was not the climate that attracted Ayub Khan. Rawalpindi had been even in the days of the British the biggest military arsenal in India.

²⁶ I met him in India in 1954. He had come for treatment. He was a very sick man, hardly audible in speech, lean enough to lend the suspicion of incipient paralysis.

²⁷ "There were constant ministry-makings and President Mirza was in his element, giving the poor country whirl after whirl, till its polity was shaken to smithereens." Suleri writes further, "All political parties were kept on tenterhooks by playing the game of musical chairs. Ministers changed from time to time and political crises were engineered with monotonous regularity". (Suleri, *President Ayub*, p. 109).

A great part of the billions in military aid received from the United States went to make Rawalpindi one of the biggest military strongholds in the East. Since Ayub's strength lay not in the popular vote, but in the support of the Army, he felt that by locating the political capital in the neighbourhood of the most powerful military base he would be in a better position to control both the Army and the civil administration.

In shaping his international policy, again, Ayub Khan preferred opportunism to idealism. Even though Pakistan had received billions in military aid from the United States and was a member of SEATO and CENTO, he managed to establish a close alliance with China, as soon as he discovered that China had hostile designs on India. He did this at the risk of annoying the United States. But he soon almost convinced the United States that Pakistan, in doing so, was only trying to serve as a bridge between Peking and Washington. In his book *Friends Not Masters*, Ayub Khan has attempted to outline the foreign policy of his thinking and the objects he had in view. Clearly the focal point of this policy was hostility to India. He assumed that in no foreseeable future could India and Pakistan resolve their differences or agree to a plan of mutual economic help and joint defence. Ayub's primary objective, therefore, was to isolate India, and in due course to build up sufficient strength to coerce India into agreeing to such extravagant demands as the surrender of Kashmir, etc. etc. Like Jinnah and Liaquat he felt that Kashmir was the key to stability in Pakistan. With the addition of Kashmir only the North-wing of Pakistan could equalise the population and territorial disparity between the Eastern and Western wings. Then only could a stable democratic set-up be possible.

In executing his ingenious plan, Ayub found an enthusiastic supporter in a young India-baiting lawyer, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. He appointed Bhutto his Minister for Foreign Affairs. Young Bhutto had good reasons for a fanatical hate complex against India. Zulfiqar Bhutto was a Law student in England when his father and the Nawab of Junagadh left for Karachi. Zulfiqar returned to India with his wife and child, hoping to adopt

Indian citizenship, and to recoup some of the family fortune his father had left. He found the Indian authorities obdurate and the local people of Junagadh personally hostile. According to one report at one stage Zulfiqar felt so harried that he "flew from India leaving his child behind in the care of Hindu friends". The Bhutto family was quite influential in Sindh. Zulfiqar had no difficulty in entering public life. He was a fiery speaker, and where India was concerned he could almost go into hysterics. He soon attracted Ayub's attention. Ayub recruited him into his Cabinet.

Ayub however was soon to discover that in Bhutto he was riding the proverbial tiger, and that his Foreign Minister was more inclined to lay down the law for the President than abide by the advice and directives of his patron. Later events were even to show that he was a potential rival and not a trusted colleague. For one thing he did not bother about working up a triangular balance with U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and China. If India was the enemy, he argued, then Pakistan, ignoring all other considerations, should make close friends with China, and act with haste. It was his reading, highly unrealistic though it proved, that after the death of Nehru India was in a state of internal turmoil. The Congress ruling Party was seriously divided. Its new Chief, Lal Bahadur, was an obscure, weak, docile, ineffective individual. Food was in short supply and famine was rampant in several parts. The Third Plan was in the doldrums, since sufficient foreign aid was not forthcoming. After having suffered military reverses against the Chinese in 1962, the army was in no position to withstand another aggression. "The people are dying in the streets in India from starvation. Indians are fighting Indians on the language question. The Sikhs are rebellious. The Muslims discontented. The army and the police are restive. Besides, there is no leadership," he harangued his audiences.

Ayub was now more than ever in a mood to listen to the advice of his fire-eating Foreign Minister rather than respond to any conciliatory gestures of Lal Bahadur. His own dictatorship was being challenged by local politicians. In East Pakistan,

a powerful movement for succession under Bhashani and a young fire-brand Mujibur Rahman was gaining strength. Many of his army chiefs had become jealous of his position. It was the time, advised Bhutto, when Pakistan, with its superior armour, its large army of trained guerrillas and emotionally-charged soldiers could make a bid to capture Kashmir by force. Chances were that India, in its present state under a weak Prime Minister, may not even resist. Even if India did resist, Pakistan could rely on many Muslims in Kashmir and in other parts of India to form a fifth column of support. In addition, there was the assurance of China joining in at an appropriate time. Thus if Ayub acted with vigour and speed, not only could he get Kashmir for Pakistan but be acclaimed as the greatest builder of Pakistan after Jinnah. Ayub threw caution to the winds and allowed Bhutto to have his way.

Blood-Triumph-Tears

Three brass urns buried under layers of rose and marigold leis lay outside the corridor of No. 10 Janpath. The sound of priests chanting vedic hymns cast a spell of sadness around the place. The aroma of burning incense filled the atmosphere. Standing abreast in a mile-long queue, men and women of all classes and faiths waited for hours to pay their last homage to their Prime Minister, who had died at Tashkent.¹ The three urns contained the ashes of Lal Bahadur Shastri. He had been ceremoniously cremated at Vijay Ghat, after his body had been flown to India. His pall-bearers at Tashkent included the Russian Premier Kosygin and the Pakistan President Ayub Khan. Fate destined that Ayub Khan should carry the corpse of the man whom by his reckless, wanton aggression he should first have made a hero, and then a martyr!

On the 4th of August, in the vicinity of the tourist resort of Gulmarg,² a few miles away from the world's finest high-altitude golf course, a shepherd was grazing his goats. He sat watching the rays of the setting sun peeping through clouds, swathing in a garment of gold the distant snow-covered peak of Nanga Parbat. But for the rustling of the trees, the chirping of birds, the bleating of grazing sheep, he was enjoying, over periodic pulls on his hukka,³ the ecstasy of silence which only

¹ On January 11, 1966.

² Kashmir.

³ Hubble bubble.

mountains can provide. He could almost have said, with Pippa,⁴ "God is in His heaven and all is well with the world!"

As dusk approached, and he was calling back his herd, two hefty, hostile-looking strangers in loose, olive-green shirts and baggy trousers emerged out of dense thickets and walked up to Mohammed Din. At the sight of them the shepherd was taken aback. Bulging from underneath their shirts were heavy belts stuffed with bullets and what seemed like guns and revolvers. They politely invited the shepherd to accompany them to a nearby cave to meet their leader. The leader paid a handsome sum to Mohammed Din, and asked him to help them in their important "Islamic" mission. He was asked to bring them information about the stationing of Indian troops, the location of ammunition stores, transport depots, etc. They also asked him to hire some ponies for them.

At this very time a few miles away another group had met a woodcutter, Wazir Mohammed,⁵ and had made him a similar offer. Mohammed Din ran down to the police station. Wazir Mohammed informed an army post. The two groups were quietly rounded up. They were found in possession of bren guns, sten guns, long-range pistols, hand grenades, dynamite sticks and explosives.

These chance arrests revealed to the Indian authorities Pakistan's secret master-plan of guerrilla infiltration into Kashmir across the cease-fire line: "Operation Gibralter". Infiltrations were to be followed by a massive attack by the Pakistan Army. The operation had been named after the Arab General Tariq who stormed Gibralter by surprise at dead of night and captured it.⁶ The operation had been planned for months, in collaboration with Chinese experts in guerrilla warfare. In the dense jungles and deep ravines around the hill station of Murree, Major-General Akhtar Hussain Malik had been training more than five thousand regulars and irregulars for this operation. According to the plan these guerrillas were to gather

⁴ Browning.

⁵ Devendra Nath, *The War with Pakistan*.

⁶ Ibid.

at pre-determined points and through devious routes and under cover move into the valley. They were to establish contact with local Muslims inside the valley and await 'D' day. The 'D' day for Srinagar was August 9. August 8 was the day of the Urs of Hazrat Pir Dastgir Sahib where thousands collected to celebrate the festival. It was hoped that the infiltrators could get mixed up with the crowds and reach Srinagar⁷ unnoticed.

On the 9th fell the anniversary of Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal from Prime Ministership. On this day the infiltrators with local helpers were expected to stage a mammoth uprising. They were to cut off the Jammu-Kashmir road, capture the airport, assassinate as many Ministers as possible and set up a "Revolutionary Council". This in turn was to "officially" invite Pakistani forces to enter Kashmir in aid of its newly-formed "Lawful Government".

A Muslim shepherd and a Muslim woodcutter had sabotaged the million-dollar "Operation Gibralter". They had given a lie to the naïve assumption that Kashmiri Muslims were either for sale or were potential traitors to Kashmir and India. Getting scent of this plan, the Indian army and the police acted with lightning speed, but with utmost caution and secrecy. A large number of infiltrators were arrested from their jungle hideouts. Many were held crossing the boundary, and many more were handed over by local people with whom they were seeking asylum. Hundreds were lost in the ravines foraging for food and shelter, till days later they made their way back to tell their dismal tale of failure.

Meanwhile, Pakistan was all set for the great 'D' day rebellion. Taking for granted that "Operation Gibralter" had succeeded, the Radio station in the Pakistan wing of Kashmir announced on the evening of the 9th of August that, as a result of a "major armed revolt", the "revolutionaries have captured the Secretariat, were in control of strategic routes, and the city of Srinagar is plastered with revolutionary posters."

It was on August 13 that India took "official" notice of these infiltrations, and Pakistan realized that "Operation Gibralter"

⁷The Capital of Kashmir.

had failed. In a broadcast to the Nation,⁸ Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri revealed that a week earlier armed Pakistani infiltrators in large numbers had crossed the cease-fire line for the purpose of sabotage and destruction. They had "attacked strategic places such as bridges, police stations and petrol depots". Appropriate action, he said, "has since been taken to locate infiltrators. Several engagements have occurred and heavy casualties have been inflicted". He further said, "Pakistan is talking of some revolutionary council and a lot of other things. All this is a mere figment of Pakistan's imagination." He then delivered a stern warning. "I want to state categorically that force will be met with force and aggression against us will never be allowed to succeed."

Dictators thrive on success. Failure is destructive to prestige. The failure of "Operation Gibralter" if taken lying down would have meant the early overthrow of the Ayub-Bhutto-Musa triumvirate. General Musa, one of Ayub's favourites, was now in command of the Army. "Operation Gibralter", they explained to their people, was only a preliminary thrust which was to have been followed by a full-scale invasion. Once the invasion began, Ayub declared, "Pakistan's invulnerable tank squadrons will cut through to Delhi and Srinagar "as a knife through a cheese cake". As a preliminary to this full-scale invasion, Pakistan forces began shelling Indian positions across the cease-fire line, and attacked several positions they considered vulnerable.

India's patience was being exhausted. The menace through infiltrations continued. Haji Pir Pass was a strategic rat-hole on the Pakistan side of the cease-fire line. Through this, major infiltrations were taking place. Partly to serve a warning to Pakistan, and partly to plug this rat-hole,⁹ a band of a hundred Indian soldiers advanced under the command of Major Dayal. Feeling their way secretly in pitch darkness, in pouring monsoon rain, they made a surprise attack on three different positions each held by the enemy in much large numbers, and

⁸ On August 15.

⁹ On August 24.

captured them. Finally they reached Haji Pir Pass. After a gallant surprise attack they captured what was one of the most strategic and important hill features in the hands of Pakistan. So surprising was the attack that a Pakistani officer with thirty men just fell into Indian hands, unaware that the Pass was with Indian and no longer with Pakistani troops. The capture of Haji Pir Pass was one of the heaviest blows to the prestige of Pakistani leaders. Opposition leaders in Pakistan clamoured for caution, and warned that Ayub was leading Pakistan to the path of destruction. Ayub and Bhutto on the other hand felt that the time had come to stake all "to wring the neck of the Indian chicken". They deprecatingly called Lal Bahadur "the long-necked Hindu chicken". Since the final operation was to be in the nature of a great gamble—a sort of last throw of the dice—it was called "Grand Slam".

On the morning of September 1, Pakistani forces launched a massive panzer invasion across the international boundary between Jammu¹⁰ and Sialkot,¹¹ along the Chhamb sector, throwing into the attack a whole tank division, more than a hundred, being the most modern, brand new American-supplied Pattons. The tanks were supported by heavy, well-directed artillery fire. Sabres and star fighters offered air cover. Pakistan hoped that in one massive sweep its forces would cut off the Jammu-Kashmir and Jammu-Poonch roads, thus bottling up the Indian army in the valley, and at the same time engage the rest of the Indian forces on the Pathankot-Delhi route. The Pakistani panzers advanced several miles across the international border and spread widely over a marshy plateau. So sure were the Pakistanis of their success that they had even invited foreign correspondents to take photographs from vantage positions and to witness the "spectacular" performance of American tanks and planes.¹² By the third day Ayub was dis-

¹⁰ Winter Capital of Kashmir.

¹¹ An important military base of Pakistan.

¹² General Musa, the Pakistani Military Chief, declared, "Indian imperialism is already under a death clap." (Devendra Nath, op. cit., p. 19.) To his men he sent the sadistic message, "You have got your teeth into the enemy's flesh. Bite deeper and deeper until he is destroyed."

cussing with American Correspondents the possibility of an early breakdown of Indian defences, enabling Pakistan "a walk-over to Delhi on one side, and Srinagar on the other". It was in this mood of defiance and optimism that Ayub, on September 2, said "No" to U. Thant when he made an urgent appeal to India and Pakistan to observe the sanctity of the international boundary and the cease-fire line. To serve a final home-thrust to Indian morale, the bellicose Chinese Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, made a lightning dash to Pakistan. He supported Pakistan's "just action", and threatened Chinese intervention "at the proper time" in aid of Pakistan.

India was surprised by the massiveness of the panzer attack but was not caught napping. On the second of September when the Prime Minister met some of the Editors, he deeply deplored Pakistan's wanton and reckless action, but looked neither excited nor perturbed. In fact he even quipped that a load of responsibility had been taken off his shoulders. He had earlier invited the three Defence Chiefs and had told them to take such action as they, as experts, thought fit, to ensure the defense of the country. In 1962 the politicians had interfered too much, and defence experts were not given a free hand. Lal Bahadur did not repeat that blunder. Having received the green signal the Defence Chiefs now acted. By the third of September, as Ayub was still debating about going to Srinagar first or to Delhi, the panzer advance had been halted.¹³

In order to mobilise the support and the resources of the people behind the defence forces, the Prime Minister set up a Central Citizens' Council for National Defence, with branches all over the country. I was placed in charge of information and publicity with a representative group of Editors, publicists and mass-media experts as collaborators.¹⁴ When reports reached us through the defence services of the halting of the

¹³ Broadcasting to the Nation on that day, Lal Bahadur briefly said, "The attack was supported by heavy artillery and tanks of Pakistan Army. Our armed forces went into action against them, and knocked out several tanks and many army vehicles. Pakistan's initial thrust has been halted."

¹⁴ The Secretary in charge of the department, Mr A. N. Jha, was a man of outstanding ability and great dynamism.

Pakistani advance in Chhamb, and the destruction of several enemy tanks, we arranged the widest publicity. But we did not announce the number of tanks destroyed. Frankly we ourselves felt unconvinced about the data of fatalities conveyed to us. We even told the defence spokesman to be cautious, since exaggerations could recoil adversely if the figures were contradicted by realities. After all, the Pattons were not built of matchwood. The defence spokesman said that he had himself the same doubts, but had been very reliably assured that the tally had been doubly checked, and the estimates, if at all, erred on the conservative side.

Indian forces by now had not only halted the Pakistani advance, but by spectacular manoeuvre, and remarkable strategy, had broken the back of the panzer force. Pakistan was proud of its Sabre jets and star fighters, and its American and Chinese-trained pilots and gunners. For the first time in this sector they were involved in encounters with the Indian Air Force, mostly equipped with indigenously built Gnats. Reports reached us that a Sabre jet had been shot down by a young pilot, Keeler, employing a Gnat. We rubbed our eyes, and wanted a double check. We were soon informed that not one but two Sabre jets had been blown up. We rubbed our eyes even more. It could not be just like that, we doubtfully asked. But as the air and ground battles continued, it soon became evident that Pakistan had the finest tanks but drove them incompetently. The Pakistan Air Force had the finest, fastest bombers and fighters but their pilots had no sense of direction nor any training in fast manoeuvrability. It was like putting a chimpanzee in charge of a giant computer.

Having frustrated "Grand Slam", the Indian Commanders decided to take the offensive, partly to relieve pressure on the ceasefire line, and partly to engage Pakistani armour in more destructive battles. A decision was taken to surprise Pakistan by forcing a breakthrough towards Sialkot,¹⁵ across the Jammu border, and towards Lahore, the capital of the North. To further stagger Pakistani forces, a dent was made

¹⁵ The biggest military base next to Rawalpindi.

far south from the Rajasthan desert into Sindh, to cut off the only railway line between Karachi and Lahore. The Indian thrust towards Sialkot and Lahore was simultaneously made from two directions on a thirty-mile front. The terrain chosen was tractable and the roads good. To foil a surprise offensive Pakistan was planning, a fourth attack was launched towards the town of Khem Karan near the Pakistani town of Kasur. This was like bearding the lion in his den.¹⁶ Ayub and his advisers were taken by surprise. It was now their turn to have a taste of war.

In the Lahore-Sialkot sector, Pakistan had spent millions building up a Maginot Line consisting of a series of "impregnable" fortresses and pill boxes camouflaged under a canal bed, or hidden behind inoffensive-looking dilapidated mud houses connected with each other and with headquarters through an effective communication system. Each fortress and pill box was well guarded and generously supplied with food and ammunition. The "Ayub Line", as this formidable defensive system was called, suddenly collapsed under the Indian attack. Indian forces soon made a breakthrough at places even across the canal. The Indian soldiers in this sector had to contend with heavy fire at close range from underground fortresses and camouflaged pill boxes, Pakistani bombers made repeated sorties overhead. During the few days of the attack, hundreds of rare feats of gallantry and valour were displayed by the Indian officers and Jawans.

It was the night of September 20. Dograi was a strategic point overlooking the Lahore salient. Crawling through bushes and wheat fields, the Jat Battalion, under Col. Hyde, proceeded under cover of night to Dograi. The Pakistanis got scent of it and opened a heavy barrage of incessant fire. One of the captured officers later said, "Not even a field mouse could have got through that incessant barrage." But these brave men, dodging, taking cover, spreading out and then converging went on crawling disregardful of the mines and the gunfire. As they reached a pill box, many Jawans rushed in with hand grenades,

¹⁶ September 6.

in the face of a hail of bullets, and routed the defenders. While hand-to-hand fighting was going on, and two thousand men were engaged in a bloody battle, the Indian tanks rolled in. By the first light of the morning sun Dograi had fallen.

During the same period Indian forces were having the Pakistanis on the run in the Sialkot-Naroval Sector. In this salient India and the enemy had deployed two infantry divisions each. But Ayub threw more than 250 tanks into the battle in the hope that his men could engage Indian forces in sufficient strength, not only to "bottle them up", but also to necessitate a weakening of Indian defences on the Chamb-Jaurian sector. Ayub was outmanoeuvred in strategy.

The most thrilling tank battle was however fought in the fields around Khem Karan, on the road to Kasur. Here Pakistanis had arranged a formidable counter-attack, to relieve the pressure on the Lahore and Sialkot salients, by forcing a breakthrough and encircling Indian forces in these sectors from the rear. *Time, New York*, wrote on September 23: "The major Pakistani counter-attack was directed at the Indians around Kasur (Khem Karan) which was chosen as the target because a Pakistani breakthrough would permit either a drive towards New Delhi or an attack northward that would cut across the Indian rear. The assault was mounted by the 1st Division reputed to be the best in the army. The Indian strategy resembled that of Hannibal, when he caught the Romans in a Baglike trap and destroyed them at Cannes. The Pakistani armoured column burst through the first Indian line and plunged on only to find itself entrapped inside a horse-shoe-shaped line of a well-fortified Indian position. Recoil-less rifles mounted on jeeps, or dug into ground emplacements, poured a heavy fire into the massed Pakistani tanks. Support fire rained down from Indian 3.7 Howitzers. With the temperature at the 100°C, the buttoned-down tanks were like ovens. The dust clouds raised by the explosions blinded tankers, which milled about like a frightened herd." The enemy had put in more than 150 tanks in the battle. Very few of them returned.¹⁷ So sure were

¹⁷ Lt.-Col. Salem Caleb at the head of his regiment charged at the very

Pakistanis of a spectacular breakthrough that Major-General Nassir Ahmad, the G.O.C. of the 1st division, himself led the attack from a safe specially constructed armoured vehicle. The General became a casualty in the encounter. His valuable vehicle fell into Indian hands as a trophy.

It was during these ding-dong periods of hope and despair that Ayub threw into battle his secret weapon. In early September, transport planes, supported by fighters, dropped at "strategic" points behind the Indian defence lines, even as far as Delhi, a large number of crack, well-armed paratroopers. They were to "blow up bridges, capture air ports if possible" and otherwise with local Muslim assistance create a fifth column in anticipation of the great "breakthrough" to Delhi. These men and officers were armed with light machine-guns, wireless sets, explosives and packed food. The scare these droppings created was certainly very great. The damage these men did was unmentionably little. They led to a mad foxhunt in all the areas in which the droppings had been witnessed and practically all the paratroopers were traced and overpowered by local civilians. In the process a lot of innocents were hauled up under suspicion although released after their identity had been established. What started as a foxhunt for "paratroopers" extended itself to a search for "spies" and "fifth columnists".

During these hectic days we in the Citizens' Council, whether at the Centre or at lower levels all over the country, knew no rest or sleep. The manner in which people responded to appeals for help was spectacular.¹⁸ Thousands enlisted everywhere as homeguards or for other duties for civil defence. In the areas along the front line, the civilians showed rare courage

time when Pakistani tanks were milling in the cloud of dust and smoke. He captured fifteen tanks in one encounter. The manner in which within a few days, in three major encounters, Indian forces destroyed or captured 300 enemy Pattons, Chaffees and Shermans almost sounded like a fairy tale.

¹⁸ Truck loads of packed provisions, radio sets, garments, blankets, for the troops, the wounded and for the refugees on the borders, poured from all sides. They were checked by hundreds of hard-working volunteers and transported to appropriate locations. Crores in money and jewellery were contributed to the defence fund.

to help the soldiers. In their own trucks, on horse, and in bullock carts they carried food and drinks right up to the fighting lines, distributing the same to the brave soldiers, disregardful of enemy fire. In certain danger areas, like Khem Karan, Burki and the Sialkot sector, the troops found difficulty in locating the enemy in heavily-grown wheat and cotton fields. Thousands of farmers, working in the darkness at the risk of exposing themselves to Pakistani fire, cleared these fields overnight, insuring the spectacular successes of some of the later Indian surprise attacks against the Pakistanis.

When the tide of war had definitely turned and Pakistan was faced with the imminent danger of a double assault on Lahore and Sialkot, London, Washington and Moscow came to Ayub Khan's timely rescue. They pleaded for an immediate cease-fire. Even though he had declared at one stage that India could not proceed from "one cease-fire to another" in response to urgent appeals, Lal Bahadur agreed.¹⁹

The cease-fire was followed by an Ayub-Lal Bahadur meeting at Tashkent at the pressing invitation of Premier Kosygin of the U.S.S.R. Lal Bahadur hoped, when he made the journey to Tashkent, that this time at least the cease-fire would lead to a lasting peace. That the cease-fire would lead to another was also the oppressive fear that weighed on his mind. Most reluctantly, struggling between hope and fear, and probably under Kosygin's pressure, he agreed to withdrawal of Indian forces from such strategic points as Haji Pir Pass, Burki, Narowal near Sialkot, and Khem Karan near Kasur. Those who were with Lal Bahadur at Tashkent felt that the more he talked to Ayub, hope became less and fears oppressed him more. He felt he was making the same blunder as India had committed earlier in agreeing to a cease-fire in Kashmir under the pressure of Mountbatten. But he felt overpowered. Finally, resistance gave place to consent. Lal Bahadur even expressed satisfaction to placate critics at home. The true story of what happened behind the scenes at Tashkent however will never be told, since Lal Bahadur was the only one to tell it. From all available facts, it

¹⁹ The cease-fire became effective on September 23, 1965.

is obvious that Lal Bahadur acted under pressure, and much in the agreement was to his dislike, and a lot which roused his fears.

On the seventh day of the negotiations, after signing the pact, Lal Bahadur attended a reception given by Kosygin in honour of Ayub and himself. Ayub seemed cheerful. Lal Bahadur looked depressed and unhappy. All day he took nothing. Even at the reception he partook only of orange juice. An undercurrent of frigidity could be felt behind the cordial make-believe of diplomacy between the chief actors. On reaching his residence Lal Bahadur took a late meal and retired for the night. He told his servant to rise early to pack up for the return journey. At 1-30 a.m. he felt a choking spasm. There was no telephone. No Doctor. He rushed out of the bedroom in search of his doctor and fresh air. Soon afterwards he collapsed.

Although a stranger in Tashkent, thousands of men, women and children lined the route of his cortege the next day. Lal Bahadur had fought the Twenty-two Days War with the resolve, courage and daring of a great soldier. He had died searching for the peace he did not find. If an honest man is the greatest work of God, then Lal Bahadur was one. For that reason alone he was great!

Indira Nehru Gandhi

Within eighteen months the elders of the Party again met to pay funeral tributes to the dead and to make the choice of a successor from the living. All eyes were again turned to the inscrutable Kamaraj, still the President of the Congress, and the redoubtable Morarji Desai, a second-time contender for the prize office. During the last eighteen months, Morarji had added to his public stature, having renounced some of his political fads, and having discreetly kept within the Party wings, adopting a critical but not an obstructive attitude towards the government. Kamaraj never expected that the party would have to make a second choice within eighteen months. He still felt committed to Nehru's wish that Morarji should be kept as far away from the throne as possible. He had also not forgotten, nor perhaps forgiven, the personal challenge that Morarji had posed to his re-election for a second term as Congress President. He tried to bring about a concensus. He failed. Morarji was this time prepared for a confrontation. Kamaraj's mind was also made up. Whether consensus or confrontation, his choice was Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi.

She had youth in her favour. And yet she was just the age at which her own father first became the President of the Indian National Congress.¹ She had the advantage of a great name and a great tradition. She had travelled widely with and without her father. She had played hostess to almost all the great celebrities of the world. She had been nurtured from her infancy in the

¹ 1929.

fire, the fury and the turmoil of the national struggle. She had already served successfully as Congress President, and as a Minister in the Central Cabinet. She had not pursued a course of conventional academic studies but had a varied education in the humanities in India and abroad. Through intimate contacts with her illustrious grandfather, with Mahatma Gandhi, with her teacher and preceptor, Gurudev Tagore, and under the tender guiding care of her own father, she had not only enriched her life with rare experience from a very tender age, but had also received a more diversified training in the culture and politics of the country than any university could offer. Her being an attractive woman, capable of holding her own in conversation or debate, added to the spectacular character of the choice. Above all, she had a good record of personal service, and a name which had neither been associated with power-seeking nor sullied by money-grabbing.

For the first time the Party adopted the democratic procedure of a secret ballot in choosing its leader. Indira Gandhi, the candidate put up by the "Syndicate", was elected by an effective majority against Morarji Desai. As I affectionately put my arms around the tender shoulders of the third Prime Minister of India, to offer her my hearty congratulations, it seemed almost unbelievable, that one who till yesterday was playing with dolls, at the feet of her grandfather, charging them to throw out the British, should be the third of the Nehru's to wear the prize crown of national leadership, and the second to succeed her own father within less than two years after his death. It was good that she was chosen by ballot and not through a concensus. The fact that she was pitted against one of the most outstanding living veterans of the national struggle and not a non-entity was important for her. This gave her the self-confidence someone in her position needed, to confront a mountain-heap of problems still facing the country. It reminded one of the old adage, "The parents have eaten sour fruit, and the childrens teeth are on edge!"

India had faced two wanton and destructive aggressions since 1962. Its economy had been badly shaken. The peace on the

borders was still tenuous. Pakistan continued to be truculent and hostile. China still posed a serious danger. China had exploded its first atom bomb. It was soon to explode its hydrogen bomb, and was reported to be well on its way to manufacture anti-ballistic missiles and other dangerous and sophisticated nuclear weapons. India's Third Plan was in the doldrums. The Fourth Plan was still in the imagination of "unchosen" planners. The unity the country had witnessed during the Pakistan war was cracking up under fissiparous pressures accentuated by political, communal, regional and linguistic chauvinism. In some areas there was even talk of secession. Internationally, India's prestige had slumped. Even contributions in foreign exchange had shrunk. The Central leadership had dwarfed. Politicians everywhere were engaged in a power struggle. The 1967 general elections were in the offing.

These were problems which would have sorely tried the ability and competence of any of the living veterans. Indira Gandhi approached them with confidence and a smile. Even though in succeeding months the going had to be pretty rough, and successes were sometimes out-done by failures and reverses, and critics became more and more vocal and uncharitable, the Prime Minister preserved her smile and a look of stoic confidence.

I had accompanied her on the first day of a hectic campaign we undertook on behalf of the Congress candidate for Parliament from New Delhi in the first General Elections.² An election campaign is not easy. Speeches have to be delivered at all sorts of places, to all sorts of audiences, at suitable and unsuitable times. There is the ever-present danger of controversy, or even violence. Feelings can run high, and sometimes politeness can be cast to the winds. This campaign was particularly controversial. The two candidates were well-matched, both were women, and both had a Congress background. In fact leading Congressmen were themselves divided in their support. Nehru was happy to receive reports of her day-to-day activities, and the tactful manner in which she handled some of the most difficult audiences. "She has the Nehru courage, the Nehru tact,

² Mrs Manmohini Sehgal (1952).

and the Nehru defiance," I told him. "She is a very independent person", he said, agreeing. "She has a will of her own. I wish she also had the Nehru toughness. See that she does not expose herself to the sun too much. Also avoid the dust." The last sentence was uttered to show the ever-present concern of a loving father for his tender daughter, since she had passed through a spate of illnesses in younger years. The manner in which she later campaigned during two subsequent elections, and lived through a Prime Minister's hectic programme during the succeeding years, showed that though tender and frail she was far from being weak. She rarely seemed to walk. It had to be a sprint.

Her marriage with Feroz Gandhi had not been an easy affair. It was by no means a case of love at first sight. Feroz first came into intimate contact with Kamala Nehru during the national struggle. Feroz belonged to a Parsi middle-class family. Circumstances helped to bring Feroz closer to mother and daughter in Europe, where he served Kamala with great devotion during her illness. After Kamala's death, he was thrown in the company of Indira in England, more as a family friend, than as a prospective "date". As Feroz often said, it took years of "selfless service" to win over Indira. Once she had decided, there was no stopping her. Feroz was handsome, capable, and very likable as a person. But he was not the type the Nehrus could approve for the cherished hand of the only daughter of Jawaharlal. His being a Parsi was the least objectionable, even though the Kashmiri Pandits were still a conservative community. Despite all the pressures brought on her, Indira stood by her choice. She finally won. They lived in close companionship afterwards, despite unforeseen strains placed by their respective public obligations.

That Indira was a very independent person,³ and had a mind of her own, soon became evident to some of us and most of her

³ She had inherited influential aunts and uncles as part of the Nehru entourage—a sort of domestic privy council for private and public affairs. While retaining a few of her own age group from the clan, she slowly eliminated the aunts and the uncles except for ceremonial occasions.

colleagues. In trying to build up the image of youth, she repelled some of the paternal gestures of the veterans, even to the extent of annoying them. I saw Kamaraj talking to Indira a few days after her election. I could witness the beguiling smile on her lips, betrayed by the deepening furrows of impatience on the forehead. I saw very clearly then that the "King maker" would soon lose favour with the "King". He did. Dr Radhakrishnan was one of the most sagacious Presidents India has had. But even he soon realized that, though his advice was listened to with utmost respect, the Prime Minister kept her own counsel in taking decisions. It was generally known that their relations were most cordial only when both saw eye to eye with each other. An eminent lawyer, who had been twice alerted for a Cabinet post by her predecessors but not appointed, told me of his first interview with Indira. "I was invited to meet her at 5-30," he said. "Her first words after exchanging greetings were 'Will you agree to join the Cabinet?' When I said 'yes', she replied laconically, 'Then it will be Law'. It was all over."

In choosing her first Cabinet, however, she felt as much a prisoner to Party pressures as Lal Bahadur or before him Nehru himself had been. Having witnessed the fading-out of great personalities, the death of giants, and the self-sought promotion of power-seekers, she realized more than any one else how ability and competence had become rare within the Party, and how age and seniority had built up vested interests which one could challenge only at one's peril. Now that she had been elected Prime Minister, and a general election was in the offing, she did not wish to challenge these vested interests, or deepen the personal fissures that already divided the leadership. Thus her first Cabinet, and even the Cabinets she chose after two general elections, could be appropriately described as a mixed grill of the old and the new, of Party men and opportunists, of veterans and of youth, representing a diversity as much in experience as in ideological approach, the major harmonising influence being the Prime Minister herself. She offered a vital portfolio to Jagjivan Ram whose ministerial experience went back to 1937. He controlled a substantial wing in the party,

consisting mostly of depressed-class representatives. She also offered a key position to youthful Dinesh Singh, a fresher to Cabinet rank and the Party.⁴ Chagla, who had fought Jinnah's communalism in the 'twenties and Pakistan on Kashmir at the U.N. in the 'sixties with remarkable ability, was transferred from Education to Foreign Affairs. Sachin Chowdhury, a brilliant young lawyer, was offered Finance. Juvenile, gray-haired Pathak, a renowned jurist, was put in charge of Law. Nandaji was unceremoniously dropped. Chavan was shifted to Home Affairs.

Left to herself, the Prime Minister would perhaps have spread her net even wider to enlist talent from outside, in the service of the Party and the country. But in the beginning her own position was far from secure. After the 1967 general elections, the position of the Congress Party was such as to restrict her sphere of choice even further. While she had found an honoured place in the Cabinet for most of the veterans, her more intimate contacts, however, were naturally with the younger group. Hostile tongues began to talk of them as the "Kitchen Cabinet". In fact even among them she had few favourites or confidantes. Some of them were only serving their apprenticeship. Like her father before her, she soon began to feel the loneliness of power, the difficulty in preserving aloofness from intrigue, and, in taking unpalatable decisions, disregarding the risk of leaving a trail of heartburns and annoyances behind. Like Lal Bahadur she relied more and more on the technocrats around her for major decisions, leaving the elders guessing as much as some of the members of the "Kitchen Cabinet" as to the way her mind was working.

In dealing with men, as well as with matters of moment, Indira set a pattern of her own. Nehru's approach to his colleagues, was consultative only to the extent it seemed necessary. He virtually gave orders. Only under exceptional circumstances did he discuss them afterwards. Where discussion did become necessary he neutralised opposition by packing the

⁴ He inherited the name of his father, the late Raja of Kalakankar, the first major Talukdar to opt for Gandhi and the Congress.

consultative body with favourable opinion. In doing so he created the illusion of "responding" to a dominant viewpoint, rather than dominating the discussion himself. The manner in which he attributed to Kamaraj the plan he had carefully evolved to serve both as a purge and as an incentive was typical of the methods by which Nehru enlisted support to endorse his calculated decisions. Lal Bahadur on the other hand invited and permitted free discussion. He gave the impression of listening intently. He would then pick up several points of common agreement, to summarise the discussion. He would end up by thanking the participants "for very useful and helpful suggestions". This would please all concerned. In explaining later some conflicts in actual decisions with advices tendered, he pleaded "as advised". Neither his Cabinet colleagues nor his intimate official advisers felt certain from where the final advice emanated. It came from Lal Bahadur himself!

Indira's manner of handling the Press, for example, was different from that of her father and of Lal Bahadur. Nehru used the Press conference as a platform to reach the four corners of the globe with his views on some matters of national or international importance. The routine questions and answers were ancillary to this definite purpose. Lal Bahadur could not hold many Press conferences. But whenever he met Pressmen he tried to share opinions with them. Indira, on the other hand, went further and tried to create a personal dialogue with the Press. Although more than frank in imparting general information, she was the least communicative so far as "news" was concerned. Her feminine subtlety combined with a smile of innocence gave her a special advantage over her predecessors in exercising the art of evasion.

While dealing with political colleagues or opponents, as time passed, she revealed a rare instinct for gauging the element of conflict, and setting in motion a process of neutralisation among opposing forces. The manner in which she dealt with different human elements around her: proud veterans and aspiring juniors, critics and slanderers, favourites and detractors, party-men and oppositionists, sometimes reminded one of Elizabeth

Tudor. Like her she gave her ear to many but her confidence to none. With her to a great measure she shared the quality of stretching her sense of independence to defiance if challenged.

For her, politics had been like basic English to an Oxford schoolboy. Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and her own father were for her among many whose grand performances she had witnessed from the front seat, with the added privilege of going in and out of the greenroom. As a constant companion of her father, and later as his official hostess, she had come into contact with some of the great figures of modern times, enabling her, after becoming Prime Minister, to resume with some of them the dialogue where it had temporarily ended with the death of her father. Such inherited contacts sometimes had the disadvantage of giving age a superiority complex. Elizabeth Tudor confronted this difficulty when she came to the throne at an early age. She inherited some of the most distinguished statesmen of the Tudor court. She succeeded in mastering the situation by offering favours to suit political ends, and by neutralising rivals. Also by emphasising, at the appropriate occasion, that even though tender and frail, she was still *Regina Britannica*, "the Queen of England". In the same manner, within less than two years, Indira Gandhi overcame the disadvantage of age by surrounding herself with the halo which symbolises the will and the majesty of a great nation. Her relationship with her colleagues reminded one of a chess player. Her main interest was not in the "pawns", but in the manner in which she could move them, to eliminate them, or to checkmate the opposition.

No Prime Minister could survive for a day if his or her chief purpose was not to seek the confidence of the people. At the same time no Prime Minister could feel effective in pursuing such a purpose in all its totality if he or she did not either have, or could not create, around him or her the environment for unfettered functioning. Indira was originally a nominee of Kamaraj and a choice of the "Syndicate". She was a "niece" to most of the veterans. Her abilities were in doubt even where affection was abundant. Having been elected, her natural con-

cern was to make a success. Besides she could not escape the feeling that it was the hand of destiny that had placed such a heavy responsibility on her tender shoulders, within less than two years after her father's death. A dictator may have seen in this a divine mission. She was not a dictator. But she none-the-less had to live up to the "expectations of destiny".

Looking around her she realized that youth had been mis-married to age. She neutralised the dominance of age by enlisting a strong element of youth. After Nehru, power was being shared between the Cabinet and the Party, the Prime Minister and the Congress President. The particular Congress President she had to deal with had become a hero after the "Purge", and had further added to his stature by placing two Prime Ministers in office in two years. He had become a sort of king-maker, Party boss and law-giver rolled into one. The Party dominated the Cabinet, not only through its President, but also through the "Syndicate", a sort of coalition of strange bed-fellows who had taken the place of the old High Command. They exercised power, not because they commanded, like the old High Command, the confidence of the people, but because in a Congress gerrymandered by a large, doubtful membership, they had established a powerful caucus. It is they who selected candidates and offered Congress tickets for elections. It is they who determined who shall be Chief Ministers, or even ordinary Ministers in the States on behalf of the Congress. They collected funds, distributed patronage and held in their hands the gifts of office. They influenced Cabinet formation and Cabinet functioning, through their key nominees. Then there was the Parliamentary Party itself, divided between the "hawks" and the "doves", the "turks" and the "turtles", each one aspiring to a ministerial position, and every member secretly feeling that after Indira, he or she was qualified enough to become the Prime Minister of the country.

During the later years of Nehru, the Opposition parties had become restive. Lal Bahadur left them frustrated. After Indira's election, they entered into a coalition of hostility, for the common purpose of damaging the public image of the Congress.

They started flinging bucketfuls of scandalous slush, in the hope of weakening the position of the Congress. It did not matter where the slush stuck, or how personal was the scandal. What could not be achieved by arguments was sought to be realised by sensation-mongering, even muck-raking. The elections were in the offing!

It was in this jungle "Wonderland" of power struggle, party intrigue, and a fusillade of hostility jointly let loose by the Opposition, that Indira like little "Alice" found herself. It was not a case of "fools dare where angels fear to tread". It was more like someone being made to wear the crown of thorns, since it seemed fairly certain to the more cautious, that it would only give sleepless nights to the wearer. Thus the period before the 1967 elections may be appropriately described, for Indira Gandhi as "Operation Survival".

The 1967 Elections

Subsidised astrologers were commissioned to make prophesies. They saw the stars from different angles, to suit the convenience of their patrons. They agreed that Indira would not last long as Prime Minister. One foresaw an early breakdown in health, at best within twelve months. Another, an early resignation due to political embarrassments created by the Opposition. A third visualised a reshuffle before the elections, deeming her a political risk. A fourth saw the Party itself losing ground and the Party and the Prime Minister both being overthrown after the elections. These forecasts received wide publicity because within and without the Party there were influential sections who, for different reasons, wished the Prime Minister a short time in office. Indira's first concern therefore was to so arrange the Party chessboard that she became a *de facto* mover of the pawns, even though the major moves were decided upon by collective consultation.

Instead of working from the bottom, she boldly started from the top. Kamaraj, the iron man of the Party, soon found that he had the Prime Minister's ear but not her confidence. Where there was a reasonable doubt about his reactions, he was not consulted. She included almost all those in the Cabinet over whom she and Kamaraj agreed. There were others, a dozen or two, about whom no reference was made to the Congress President. Since Kamaraj could now neither extend political patronage nor influence policies, his prestige slumped considerably even before the 1967 elections. Dr Radhakrishnan was

concerned about Indira like a good uncle. She did not want fatherly counsel, but support. It was freely mentioned at the time that Dr Radhakrishnan would be only too willing to continue in office if assured of election. Indira on the other hand placed Dr Zakir Hussain in the field. Despite unprecedented opposition, hitherto unknown in Presidential polls, she made it a test case, and got him elected. To prevent the Congress Presidentship becoming a challenge, she agreed to the election of Nijalingappa, the Chief Minister of Mysore, through a process of concensus with Kamaraj. Nijalingappa belonged to a second line of Congress leadership. He was a junior member of the "Syndicate", most of whose topmen were aspiring for the job. She downgraded the office of President. In the cabinet, Jagjivan Ram represented the old guard; Chavan, the new power bloc. Any of these could become a serious rival. To neutralise the two, she invited Morarji Desai to become the Deputy Prime Minister, ignoring the prejudices of her father, and the earlier warnings of Kamaraj. Thus she reduced inner conflicts by neutralising rivals. At the same time it seemed safer to have Morarji as a courtier than to preserve him as a disgruntled rival. Having established herself as the prime distributor of patronage among partymen and parliamentarians, she made a calculated use of her opportunities, keeping a fair balance between the "Turks" and the "Turtles", increasing personal supporters among both.

Neither her father nor Lal Bahadur had to confront an Opposition so united against the Congress, so hopeful of power, and so obstreperous and vocal in its denunciation of Congress policies and Congress leadership as the one which faced the new Prime Minister and her colleagues on the Treasury benches. If it was shortage of food as a result of droughts, if the rupee had to be devalued, if it was a calamity resulting from floods or an outbreak of violence looting or arson, the Opposition jointly threw the blame on the central administration. They blamed the Congress for God-created disasters or man-made blunders. To add fuel to the fire, charges of corruption were freely flung against high and low, officials,

Ministers and Party leaders, some with substance, some without foundation. Dead scandals and the latest and the loosest gossip were bundled together to create sensation. Unfortunately the discreditable record of some of the conspicuous Party bosses, in power or out of power, offered enough ammunition to the Opposition to keep up a constant fusillade of attack, mixing facts sometime liberally with fiction.

The Prime Minister for a time herself became the *bete noire* of slander. In addition to defending others, she had to defend herself, whether to silence or to challenge the voice of calumny. Did she as her father's daughter receive a costly necklace from a visiting monarch, or a sable coat from a visiting statesman? How did she acquire the land her husband left her. Did she visit her constituency in an official conveyance? Did she spend the time in Oxford as a dilettante or a student? Such were the charges levelled against her, not, as the candid replies showed, that the charges had substance or relevance, but because the Opposition was desperately trying to use any stick to damage the Congress image and the character of its leaders, in anticipation of the 1967 elections.

Even though the Parties differed widely from each other on political issues and ideologies, they felt, each one of them separately, that their strength lay in debunking the Congress. Such a challenge did not face either Nehru or Lal Bahadur. Indira met the challenge with courage, patience and candour. If some one in the Congress had blundered or had been legitimately charged with corruption, she boldly admitted the facts. Where facts were in doubt she agreed to a probe. As for herself, she did not hesitate to refute some of the sinister allegations by convincing data, not sparing even personal details. In this process she may not have completely silenced the tongue of slander, but she did take away its sting, emerging as one who, in the people's eyes, seemed "more sinned against than sinning". The manner in which the Prime Minister outwitted and sometimes out-maneuvred her detractors could be crudely but symbolically compared to the efforts of half a dozen fishermen trying laboriously to catch a dodging porpoise with moth-

eaten nets. "Operation Survival" was for Indira, therefore, a process of neutralising several elements of rivalry, conflict, and disunity within the Congress, and to create for herself and the Congress an atmosphere of harmony and common purpose.

Within the Party, she had to be constantly on the *quie vive*, like a tight rope dancer who must neither swing too much to the right nor to the left. In it, influential sections had already started working at cross purposes, more in search for power than to enhance the prestige of the Party. Those who were in Parliament wanted to feel assured that they would get the Congress ticket. Those who had been waiting in the wings were equally eager to get a chance. Elections were an expensive affair. A routine election cost a candidate anywhere between ten thousand to a hundred thousand rupees. Election by itself therefore was a liability, if it did not bring with it a ministership or an office of profit. Thus there were those in the Party who employed "loyalty" and gallant subservience as a means to gaining favour. There were others who indulged in righteous opposition so that they should be appeased or silenced, for the sake of harmony. The emotional loyalty to a cause, and the sense of camaraderie born of close association in the national struggle, no longer bound the Congress rank and file together. The evil of opportunism was fast spreading with the imminent danger of horse-trading between groups, if personal ambitions were not satisfied.

Even though still in power, but because of individual desires to share in that power, the Congress was corroding with internal rivalries and at lower levels had fallen more and more into the hands of undesirable and undependable elements.¹ Having

¹ N. Sanjiva Reddy, Union Transport Minister, in one of his candid moments said, "A lot of filth and dirt have gone into the Congress". Govind Sahai, Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee of Uttar Pradesh (July 8, 1966), told a Press conference "never before in Congress history had bogus membership been attempted on such a massive scale as it had been done this time". A band of freedom fighters meeting on August 15, 1966, declared in righteous indignation that power "had seriously impaired the high sense of purpose and dedication which once inspired its leadership and rank and file. Time-servers of yesteryears and self-seekers from the present generation are swelling the party ranks and like bad coins driving

been Congress President during a critical period, Indira Gandhi, more than any one else, realised the extent of corruption that had set into the Party, and the virtual sand dunes of bogus membership on which power was being sustained.² Casteism, groupism and bossism now vitiated the whole atmosphere, and the snobbery and extravagance of those in office nauseated the common people. The choice the Prime Minister now faced was either to embark on a major purge within the Congress, risk the breaking up of the Party or preserve the status quo, even though it covered a multiplicity of sins and sinners, and wait till the elections were over. If it had taken eighteen years for the Party to descend to the abyss of sloth and opportunism, she argued, she did not have as many months before the elections to clean up the mess and to revitalise the organisation from the base. It was a herculean task! She thought it best to leave things alone till the elections were over. At the same time, she felt that even though these inherited weaknesses in the Party could handicap its success, the elections by themselves may do some heavy pruning, and remove in the process a lot of dead wood which would otherwise not be possible through Party action. Her main consolation at this juncture lay in the realisation that if her own party had become weak, the Opposition Parties by and large had a mediocre leadership, and were also divided both at the Centre and in the States. None of them was singly so strong as to completely overthrow the Congress.

February, 1967, almost twelve months after she had assumed charge as Prime Minister, marked the climax of "Operation Survival". During the previous three general elections, Jawaharlal Nehru had been the chief campaigner on behalf of the Party. The marathon tour Indira Gandhi undertook as

out true Congressmen. With unprincipled opportunism as their creed and personal ambition as their goal, they are trying to capture and manipulate the levers of power and turn the Party into a machine for gathering votes and dispensing patronage".

² Addressing the AICC soon after her election she referred "critically to large-scale bogus membership in the Congress and had suggested that steps be taken to eliminate it".

chief campaigner of the Congress was no less strenuous, and no less exhausting. But it was not all garlands and rose petals. While thousands shouted "Indira Gandhi Zindabad", there were boos and catcalls, black flags and hecklings, cheers and jeers and even, at one place, she had to leave the meeting with a bleeding nose.³ Unlike her father, she was out to defend a Party which had now only past greatness to boast about, and a lot of delinquency to answer for. She also realised that unlike her father she was undertaking the campaign not to insure the success of "every donkey" or "lamp post" with a Congress ticket, but to salvage as much of the strength, the popularity and public support for the Party as she could, against heavy odds.

It was a Friday.⁴ I was talking to the Prime Minister in the palatial Hyderabad House. His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad had built this magnificent palace in the late 'twenties, but had stayed in it, and that too during brief visits, only thrice. Around the inner courtyard the Nizam had built a row of cubicles in a semicircle where his five-score wives stayed. They entered the formal rooms of the palace only when invited. It was customary for the Begums to eat after the Nizam had started and end when he called for his plate to be removed. As the Nizam ate sparingly himself, the wives had to retire hungry. This saved money and kept the wives in good trim. I was enlivening the company with these tit-bits when the microphone broke into the conversation, and a sad voice announced, "His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad is dead."⁵ Suddenly one felt a sense of vacuity. The head of the princely order, the richest man in the world, was dead!

We were gathered in his palace, with the Prime Minister of India amidst us, to watch, as in a cricket match, the results of the 1967 general elections. Hyderabad House had been temporarily converted into an election news centre. Over the

³ She was hit by a stone during an election meeting in Orissa.

⁴ February 24, 1967.

⁵ He had been ailing for some time. He died at the age of 86.

Bokhara carpets and the French tapestry-upholstered sofas ran a complex network of cables, connecting teleprinters, microphones, telephones, etc. Here minute by minute, hour by hour, election results from all over the country were being flashed and transmitted by a couple of hundred newsmen gathered from all over the world.⁶ It was during a peak hour of news flashes that the Prime Minister had arrived. A spate of dismal reverses came flashing over the wires.

By the time the day had ended the Congress had lost in six states: Kerala, Madras, Punjab, Rajasthan, Orissa and West Bengal. It had lost every seat for the Lok Sabha in Madras. The voice on the microphone announced that the Congress President, Kamaraj, had been defeated in his home constituency, Virudhunagar, by a 28-year-old student leader, Srinivasan! The voice continued: S. K. Patil, the Congress Treasurer, Atulya Ghosh, a senior member of the "Syndicate", Industries Minister Sanjivavva and Food Minister Subramanyam had been thrown out. Finance Minister Sachin Chowdhury and Commerce Minister Manubhai Shah had been badly mauled. The whole Madras Cabinet had been practically defeated. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, P. C. Sen, had been thrown out. At the Centre half of the Union Cabinet had been unseated. During the period the Prime Minister stayed, she continued to smile. Was she pleased or was she perplexed? No one could ask, nor did her smile offer an answer. Before the Prime Minister left, the microphone announced, "Mrs Indira Gandhi has been elected." Next day it was declared that she had beaten her rival by 91,000 votes. Others returned with overwhelming majorities were Defence Minister Chavan, Food Minister Jagjivan Ram and Morarji Desai. The voter had done much of the pruning which Indira Gandhi dared not suggest to the Party, and more which she did not expect.

This reminded me of a one-act play I once saw in New York. A rich, elderly husband with his young, unfaithful wife returned home late from a party. The wife was wearing a dia-

⁶ It was all arranged for the first time by M. L. Bhardwaj, the dynamic Principal Information Officer of the Government.

mond necklace. A gunman emerged out of the shadows and at the point of the gun demanded that she hand over the necklace. She resisted. He shot. She was dead. As the burglar was fleeing with the necklace, the husband stopped him. To the bewildered gunman, he said, "Shake hands, my boy. You have done what I wanted to do for years. Now run along, and take the booty." As the curtain lowered, the husband was seen pulling out another necklace from a safe. Musing, he said, "How sad neither she nor he knew that those diamonds were fake!"

After practically twenty years of dictatorship, the Congress Party had now been cut to size. The electorate had lopped off some of the tall poppies, and swept away a lot of the Party's dead wood. Democracy could now make a new start, and the Congress as a result of the shock could revitalise itself, if it chose, under new leadership, by renouncing, if the requisite sacrifice was forthcoming, some of the pomp and extravagance which had invoked the repugnance of common people.⁷

Indira Gandhi was elected Prime Minister without opposition. As an act of prudence and as a gesture of goodwill she invited Morarji Desai to become Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. Opposition parties combined to form coalition governments where the Congress had been defeated. They even entered into improvised pacts to challenge Congress supremacy where it had obtained tenuous majorities. While the elections had resulted in a revolt, the new imbalances led

⁷ Wrote Frank Moraes (Editor, *The Indian Express*), February 27, 1967, "If it was a massacre, it was a most selective massacre. In choosing their victims the electorate, of whom 75% are illiterate, showed a sense of judgment and discrimination which would flatter a far more sophisticated electorate.... The corrupt politician was given short shrift, with the incompetent. The power-drunk politician was cut to size.... The Congress has at last got what it long deserved."

"Who would today see in the Congress Party," wrote Eric P. W. de Costa, the "Gallup" of India, "the glory of the Gandhian age, or the impregnable fortress from which Jawaharlal Nehru's ideals went forth to every State. In two brief but breath-taking months, two-thirds of the population of the Indian Union has passed under non-Congress administrations. The Centre holds firm, but it is an island, the only Congress-administered area from Amritsar to Howrah".

to a peculiar sort of legislative guerrilla warfare in which men and women changed party loyalties overnight, not in response to any call of duty, but as short-cuts to personal aggrandisement and power. This was euphemistically called "defection".

In most of the States, neither the Congress Party nor the Coalitions which had assumed control could expect to insure stability unless it was possible to convert most of their supporters into Ministers or Deputy Ministers. This would have been like the proverbial Polish Diet where there were Ministers and no Members, or the legendary army of "Pomerania" which had only officers and no soldiers. Since this was not possible, the leftovers were under constant temptation to trade their votes for office to a rival Party. The canvassing was brisk and the spoils were tempting. "Ministry Toppling" became a sort of legislative acrobatics. A Congress member in Haryana held the record of floor-crossing eighteen times in eighteen weeks. Chavan appropriately referred to this growing army of political turncoats as "Aya Ram" and "Gaya Ram" (Mr Coming and Mr Going).

Even though the phenomenon seemed repugnant to those conditioned to deeper, more emotional and more stable Party loyalties in the past, the fact that some of the Chief Ministers such as Rao Birendra Singh of Haryana, Charan Singh of Uttar Pradesh, Ajoy Mukherjee of West Bengal, G. N. Singh of Madhya Pradesh, were themselves defectors from the Congress to start with, took away from defection the odium of treachery. The Congress offered counter-temptations to attract defectors. It even supported puppets in the game of Ministry-toppling, creating a situation whereby no party had a clean record. The kettle started calling the pan "black". Each party declaimed righteously against the guerrilla tactics of the others. All this introduced into national politics an element of instability hitherto unknown.

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Beware the Ides of March !”¹

“Beware the Ides of March,” said the political soothsayers. Whether it was a warning to the “Indicate”² or the “Syndicate”, one could not foretell! The mid-term elections for the Lok Sabha had been fixed for March 1971.

After being chosen Prime Minister for the second time, Mrs Indira Gandhi tried to create a rapport between the “Turks” and the “Turtles” and to harmonise the relationship between the Parliamentary Party and the Organisation. Soon, however, fresh bye-elections brought back to Parliament a few of the veterans who had been defeated in the 1967 elections. The more prominent of them were Shri Kamaraj and Shri S. K. Patil. The balance of power shifted from the Congress Parliamentary Party to the Parliamentary Board, in which the Prime Minister was the youngest among veterans.

Confronted with this new shift in the power balance, the Prime Minister and her younger colleagues naturally began to question the supremacy of the Parliamentary Board, which again in turn was dominated by a closely-knit caucus of strange bed-fellows called the “Syndicate”. The veterans, on their part, felt any questioning of their authority as heresy. These veterans were no longer among the great of the freedom struggle, but were mostly the left-overs of a grand tradition. And yet they were inclined to be spiteful of the young to whom, they said, freedom had come as a gift; power as a

¹ Ides fall in mid-March.

² Congress section led by Indira Gandhi.

prize. They had the taste of office, but not the experience of suffering. They had not known, they said, the searing grip of handcuffs, the sting of the jailor's lash, the tortures of the dungeon, or the deadly silence of the isolation cell. But it was not their fault, the youngsters pleaded, if they were born late. At the same time they queried as to how long was a tattered jail ticket to serve as a passport to high office. Thus, where ideological differences seemed only like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the conflict of personalities became acute.

Though age was very much in her favour, time was against Mrs Indira Gandhi. If she had marked time, and waited patiently, some of the veterans would have disappeared through natural wear and tear, and some would have become physically infirm, or mentally senile. But there were only a little over two years left to the next general elections. Mrs Gandhi had to decide whether to play the game of the Parliamentary Board, observe the rules laid down by the veterans, preserve the unity of the party, and help to preserve the veterans and the Parliamentary Board in supreme authority, or to adopt a policy of open defiance and take the consequences.

Meanwhile, Dr Zakir Hussain died. Mr V. V. Giri, the Vice-President, took charge. Giri declared his firm intention to stand for Presidentship, whether any Party adopted him as a candidate or not. The choice of the "Syndicate" fell on Mr Sanjiva Reddy, a younger man who, it was hoped, would also be acceptable to the Prime Minister, because of age and because he was then "Speaker" of the Lok Sabha. The "Syndicate" considered him more dependable than Giri, if at any time Mrs Gandhi chose to rebel, or to call for a dissolution of Parliament to get out of their noose.

Having laid the trap, and having also ensured a majority for Mr Reddy in the Parliamentary Board, the veterans invited the Prime Minister at Bangalore³ to walk in. She did. But she soon walked out. She endorsed the nomination of Mr Sanjiva Reddy, but before long began to canvass support for Mr Giri. "This is not cricket" shouted the elders. "All is fair

³ A.I.C.C. Meeting in August, 1970.

in love and war! And this is war," shouted back the young "Turks". "The Parliamentary Board is the Congress," claimed the veterans. "Those in the Parliamentary Party are more representative. Indira Gandhi is their leader," retorted the rebels. Indira Gandhi had never been spanked even in her adolescence. This political spanking by the elders entered like iron into her soul. It brought out in her all the inherited defiance of the Nehrus, their capacity to gamble for high stakes, and to accept any challenge when pride was hurt, even at the risk of reckless manoeuvres.

She warned the veterans of serious consequences before leaving Bangalore. Serious consequences followed with breathtaking speed, one after the other, and no holds seemed barred. With her active support Giri got elected with a thumping majority. She wanted to hit back and hit hard. She dismissed Morarji Desai as Finance Minister. By an Ordinance she ordered the takeover of fourteen Banks and later the Privileges and Privy Purses of the Princes.⁴ The "Syndicate" dominated the Parliamentary Board. The Prime Minister created a Parliamentary Board of her own. Finally, the Congress split, the "Indicate" led by Indira Gandhi disputing the right of the "Syndicate" to speak on behalf of the Indian National Congress. A guerrilla warfare started. Every ethical and unethical method was employed to topple each other from positions of power.⁵ Party alliances were made overnight and broken by day. The country was subjected to whirl after whirl of unpredictable manœuvre.

In December 1971, Indira Gandhi threw her biggest challenge to the Old Congress. After it had adjourned, she asked the President to dissolve Parliament and call for fresh elections. Giri agreed. The veterans formed a Grand Alliance with the Jan Sangh, the Swatantra, and the S.S.P. to seek the

⁴The Supreme Court amended the order on Banks and annulled the Order against the Princes.

⁵During the 1971 Election campaign, Shri Morarji Desai referred to the leaders of the New Congress as "Bandicoots". Shri Chavan paid back the compliment by calling the leaders of the Old Congress "Old Gangsters"

verdict of the electorate for their one-point programme : "Indira Hatao". "She lacks education, she is ambitious, unscrupulous and arrogant!" they shouted.

Indira Gandhi virtually campaigned alone for a party which till yesterday was the fiction of her own creation. She won a landslide victory, securing more than a two-third majority in the Lok Sabha, trouncing in the process the Parties of the right and the Parties of the left. Never in Parliamentary annals a defeat had been so complete, or a victory so miraculous. Even if she had put up a "lamp post", and some she did put up were no better, it would have been elected.

Almost at the very time when Indira Gandhi was celebrating her electoral grand-slam, a leader almost her age was being forced into a bitter struggle to seek enforcement of the democratic verdict of seventy-five million people in East Pakistan. With a ninety-five per cent majority his people had supported him and his party in the national elections. Mujibur Rahman⁶ ruefully remarked that while Indira Gandhi had been sworn in as Prime Minister within a fortnight of her being elected, he was waiting since December even for the National Assembly to meet. Unfortunately, for Sheikh Mujib and his associates, the verdict of the ballot box was soon to be challenged by bullets. A reign of terror followed in March, involving the savage, brutal massacre of thousands of unarmed, innocent helpless men, women and children. Tanks and bombs were used by West Pakistan to undo the clear verdict of the electorate.

⁶ Mujibur Rahman was born in a Landlord family in Gopalganj in Faridpur District of East Bengal in March 1921. He graduated from Islamia College, Calcutta in 1947. He led the student movement in various capacities. In 1941 he took an active part in the movement for the removal of the Holwell monument in Calcutta. He spearheaded the language movement and later on the struggle for a fair deal for East Pakistan. Between 1949 and 1966, he spent 11 years in prison. Tall, wizard-eyed, pipe-smoking, Mujibur Rahman grew to be a spell-binding orator, a dedicated patriot and an uncompromising advocate of the rights of his people.

“... And Promises to Keep!”

What the shape of things will be in years to come seems unpredictable. The coming years portend unprecedented political and economic upheavals in the whole of South and South-East Asia. Whether these upheavals will result in the establishment of a new and better order, or will accentuate for many more years to come conditions of conflict and mal-adjustment, depends on the manner in which the leadership of these countries meets the challenges, or endeavours to solve the problems, that have been piling up, and for which the mere fact of political freedom has not found an answer.

In East Bengal whatever may be the political outcome of the recent carnage, the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse must soon overrun both the East and the West for a time, for which a military approach can have no defence or solution. In fact, if military madness persists for long, there might be serious repercussions in the North-West Frontier, in Baluchistan, even in Sindh, challenging the supremacy of army dictatorship and the bureaucratic junta of the West. In West Punjab itself the voice of reason cannot remain silent for long.

Fortunately in India, a stable Government commanding a three-fourths majority has been established at the Centre. India will have held its State elections in 1972. Whatever the results, it is to be hoped that the electorate will remove the elements of instability resulting from the toppling game, and the rat race for defections that have corrupted public life and fouled the political atmosphere. Having endorsed the

democratic method, the people now naturally feel impatient for quick results. If in offering a landslide victory to the Prime Minister the electorate has performed a "miracle", is it to be wondered if the unemployed and the hungry, also in return, expect from her and her associates the early "miracle" of removing poverty, finding employment for the unemployed, and curbing prices, so that the essentials of life do not elude the common man? Leadership has its glory as well as its responsibilities. Since the Prime Minister chose to become the symbol of the New Congress, the burden of fulfilment of promises made to the electorate must naturally fall on her shoulders.

If in assessing the situation one feels pessimistic about early solutions, it is not because anyone doubts the sincerity of Mrs Indira Gandhi, or her impatience to move forward and rapidly, but because neither her vision, nor her dynamism are shared by her colleagues, most of whom jumped into the band wagon guided by self-interest rather than through a spirit of dedication or service. Pessimism arises also from the fact that the bureaucratic set-up, with which must rest the execution of whatever plans the Prime Minister may have, is even today as wooden and anti-diluvian as it was twenty-five years ago, except that it has become more cumbersome, more corrupt and more inefficient through the years. For twenty-five years the bureaucrat has built a wall between the rulers and the ruled, the clerk and the *chaprasi* being the end-post guardians. Hitherto, therefore, India has had a Government only "of the people," and "for the people". It is only when from the Prime Minister downwards to the *chaprasi*, and the millions in rags, and the thousands in affluence, all get involved in a joint endeavour to revolutionise the political and economic life of the country that India will have also a Government "by the people". It was on such a psychology of voluntary involvement, not forced commitment, that the national struggle for freedom led by Gandhi was based. It is only through such involvement that the war on poverty can succeed.

Meanwhile poverty and hunger cannot wait! A Government

or a Party cannot drape the naked with promises, or feed the starving by statistical assurances that prosperity is around the corner. It is to the credit of the Indian people that despite the slow process of development, despite the set-backs and frustrations the country has suffered during the last twenty-four years, they have preserved their faith in democracy. It is because the average Indian even in his rags is a grand individualist. The average Indian would be satisfied if his minimum needs of food, clothing, and shelter can be met. He would be prepared to work fairly hard, if he can be offered the prospect of decent employment. He is least inclined to cut people's throats, or to cut people's pockets because of their affluence. He is God-fearing enough to accept philosophically the disparities between different strata of society provided he is not exploited to preserve those disparities. But he cannot wait indefinitely for his minimum needs, or suffer in silence the galling frustration of broken pledges, multiplying controls, and the increasing arrogance and rapacity of political bosses and petty officials, more stultifying to his sense of individualism than the fact of poverty.

In this background the emergence of Communism as a political force within the country presents a very serious problem. If, as in some cases, it was entirely indigenous in concept, "Communism" would not be a danger, but just another "ism" for solving national problems. Unfortunately in all its varieties, it is not only alien in origin and concept, but envisages as in the case of a certain type of communalism, extra-territorial loyalties. Some sections have not only resorted to the cult of violence and murder, but have openly challenged the constitution and the authority of the State. They even talk of secession!

This is an age when the world is soon finding itself divided between those who control nuclear and possible cosmic weapons and those who do not. Those with these weapons, no matter how they obtain them, will have a much more decisive position in determining the balance of power in international affairs, than those who depend for defence on weapons which

became obsolete after the Second World War. Within another five or ten years China will have become a strong nuclear power. It is already substantially powerful in this respect. If the present state of hostility between India and its neighbouring countries continues, no non-proliferation treaty can prevent China from passing on nuclear know-how, even deadly nuclear weapons to Pakistan.¹ Any Indian who believes that other big powers will interfere on India's behalf at the right moment, or would make such a deadly conspiracy impossible, is living in a fool's paradise.

Indian history is replete with instances, where in addition to superiority of weapons, an invader was helped by fifth columnists within the country. National unity today is under serious strain. One Communist Party is already singing the Mao Tse-tung anthem. Another is fiddling for Russia. Pakistan is not altogether without communal contacts in India. The Muslim League, which should have been buried after partition, is now receiving political patronage, and is even being sought after for sharing political power. These are dangers to which thinking men cannot close their eyes. They only add to the threat posed to India in addition to her nuclear impotence.

India's foreign policy also needs rational re-thinking. The political environment in the world has changed considerably since Nehru conceived the policy of nonalignment. Non-alignment was evolved to meet the exigencies of the then prevailing world conditions. These do not exist. Nonalignment was a child of necessity, not a doctrine of choice. The entry of China as a nuclear power, backed by vast human

¹ According to Dr Theodore Taylor and Dr Ralph, two eminent nuclear scientists, "making an atomic bomb is a thing you could do in a basement with material you can readily buy anywhere. A workable bomb could be put together for about £120,000". Information once top secret is now in the possession of every schoolboy—*Hindustan Times*, April 22, 1968. Dr H. J. Bhaba, a Physicist of international repute, felt that India could manufacture plutonium bombs in eighteen months, within the resources available to the country. He estimated the cost then at twenty-two lakhs. The possession of plutonium bombs, he said, could prove as much a deterrent as any other bombs.

resources, unresponsive to international discipline, trying to create regional blocks and spheres of influence of its own, introduces a serious factor in international politics. It poses fresh problems to the world and more especially to India.

Today when the colonial powers are pulling out of South-East Asia, and the United States at some stage may throw up the sponge, a power vacuum would be created, leaving China the master of the situation. We are nearing a stage when such a vacuum can become a dangerous reality and could be filled in only by selective alignment between those primarily concerned with the preservation of peace and the protection of the nations of the region. Unless India plays an important part in consolidating the resistance of this region to Chinese expansion, India itself may be exposed to serious dangers in course of time. Apart from resisting Chinese expansion on land, it is far more vital for India to insure that the high seas remain open and free, because in any emergency it is the high seas through which India can receive vital help.

Today, all things considered, defence should have the highest priority next to economic rehabilitation of the people. Even if a temporary respite could be obtained against aggression by diplomatic moves, India will finally have to depend on its military and economic strength, to preserve peace around its borders, and to safeguard its integrity, whatever the cost. India's defence would need not only the manufacture of latest nuclear weapons, but also the securing for the army, the air-force and the navy as sophisticated equipment as possessed by any of the advanced nations in Asia. India will also need to build up sooner rather than later a large militia of well-trained and dedicated soldiers. A country like India can ill afford a massive standing army. Least of all can it enlarge it in an emergency. Sooner or later its vast potential of youth will have to be harnessed to the emergencies of defence making at least a million or two trained men always available for the defence of the country.

It is these tasks that await the leadership of tomorrow. It is by the manner in which that leadership approaches these

tasks that the maturing electorate will accept or reject it. Age is on the way out. But youth also cannot command the heights only by preaching slogans, invoking the "isms" that aliens formulated yesterday for meeting a different set of political and economic conditions. Nor do solutions lie in giganticism in promise, without the dedication and endeavour of fulfilment. Youth therefore has to break new ground, make radical changes in policy and programme, establish new alliances, show more dedication and sense of service and sacrifice, fighting at the same time against religious bigotry, obscurantism and superstition, to enable India to catch up with the progressive nations of the world!

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